

Animal Idioms, Bird Idioms,  
Colour Idioms, Flower Idioms,  
Food Idioms,  
Number Idioms,  
Plant Idioms,  
Water Idioms...

Discover them all! Get their  
meanings, learn about their  
origins... use them, work them  
into your spoken  
and written  
language...



# idioms are fun



# Idioms are fun



*A Wilco Book*

Outstanding works of universal interest



# ANIMALS

We keep animals as pets, we need their help to do a million things... ride, hunt, plough... and then we use them to add a little excitement to our language, by weaving their characteristics and traits into idioms which have a lot of history behind them... So here's for some wordplay, animal style!

## Bark is worse than your bite

### Meaning

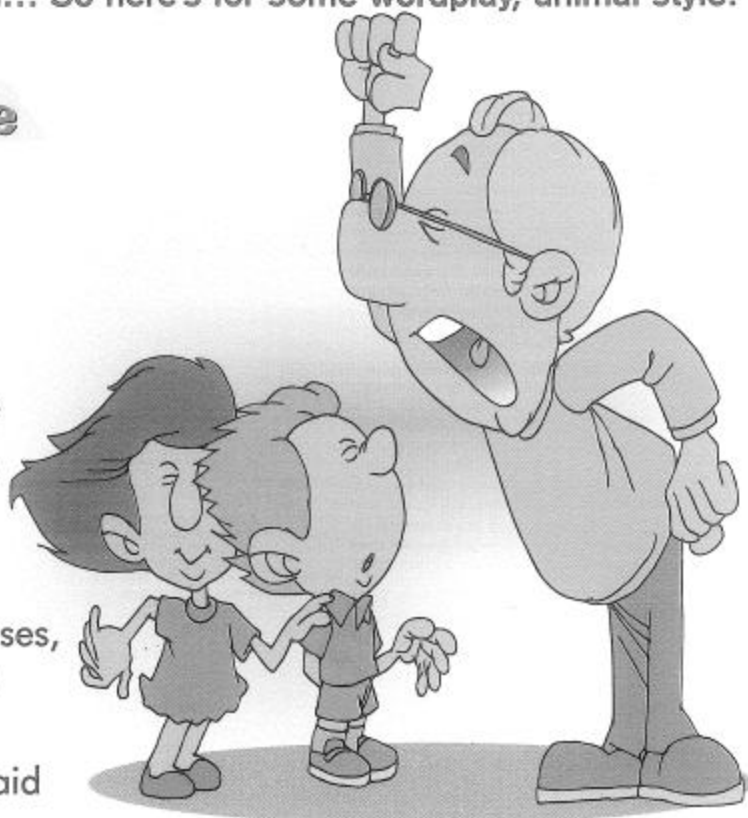
Sounding more frightening than you actually are.

### Usage

Though our neighbour is forever shouting at us, Larry says his bark is worse than his bite.

### Origin

This saying originates in the 17th Century when dogs kept as pets simply guarded houses, and a dog that barked really fiercely always sounded like he would bite a bit off you. But if the dog didn't really bite, then it was said that his bark was worse than his bite!



## Birds of a feather flock together

### Meaning

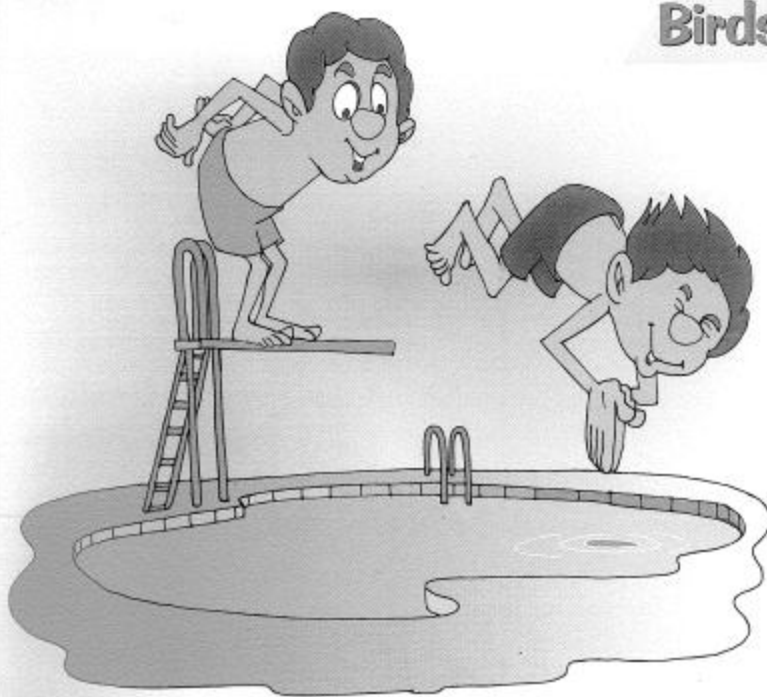
People who have common interests or habits are usually together.

### Usage

All my friends have the same interests and like to go hiking. I guess we are like birds of a feather, flocking together!

### Origin

This is a saying that has been used by man for more than 2000 years. If you observe carefully, you will find that birds of one kind always fly together. You never see a crow flying with pigeons, do you?



## Black sheep of the family

### Meaning

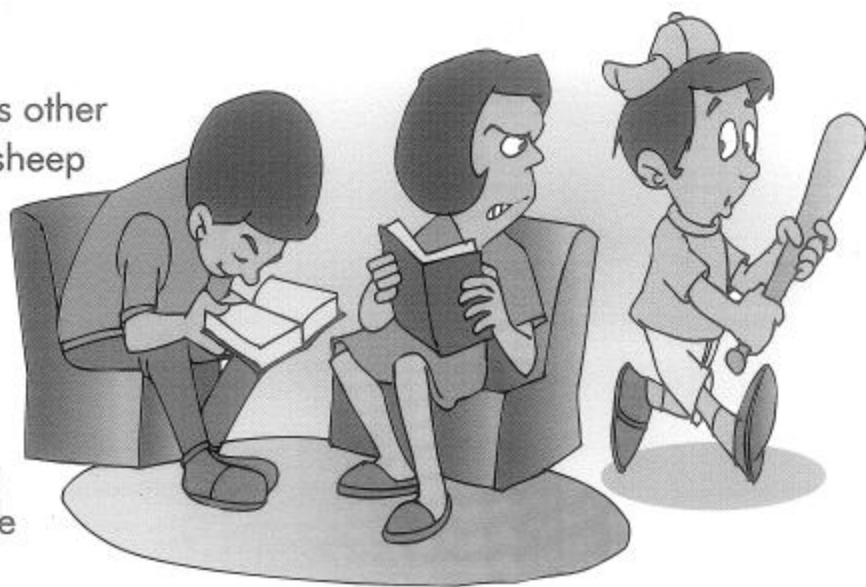
The most different or odd one out in a group or a family.

### Usage

As David does not study hard like his other brothers he is considered the black sheep of his family.

### Origin

The colour black is associated with evil and a sheep that is all black is rare, especially in a herd of all-white sheep. So a black sheep in a white herd is definitely the odd one out. In the early 1800's, shepherds thought that black sheep scared off the white ones and therefore favoured them less. Slowly, this saying came to refer to the least favoured person in a family or group.



## Bull in a china shop

### Meaning

To be extremely clumsy.

### Usage

Whenever Roy is in the kitchen he breaks something, so his mother says that he's like a bull in a china shop!

### Origin

Bulls are clumsy creatures, large and graceless. When they move they always knock things out of their way. This idiom found its way into speech when dishes and plates made out of china (porcelain) were introduced in Europe in the 16th Century. Imagine if a bull got into a china shop... what havoc it would cause?





# A leopard cannot change his spots

## Meaning

We cannot change the nature of things.

## Usage

Mr. Wilson could not yell at Fred for stealing his mangoes because he is a very gentle and forgiving person. This instance portrays that Mr. Wilson was like a leopard who cannot change his spots.

## Origin

Have you seen the spots on a leopard? The saying originates from the 'Holy Bible.' In the book of Jeremiah in the Holy Bible there is a verse which says 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard change his spots?' which means that the basic nature of things does not change, even with changed circumstances?



# Crocodile tears

## Meaning

False or fake tears.

## Usage

Peter fell down but did not hurt himself. He cried crocodile tears only because he wanted his dad to buy him something.

## Origin

Have you ever seen a crocodile crying? I'm sure you haven't! Therefore anyone who is crying crocodile tears is just pretending. The ancient Romans used this expression freely. Renowned writers like Lord Tennyson and William Shakespeare used this expression to mean insincere sorrow.



## Cry wolf

### Meaning

False warning about a danger that is not real.

### Usage

My brother points to the sky and says he can see rockets flying which are going to crash onto the earth. But none of us ever look up because we know he is crying wolf.

### Origin

Aesop, the famed Greek storyteller, told a story about a shepherd boy who would fool his friends by saying that a wolf had come to eat their sheep. After a few times, when his friends realised that he was playing the fool they stopped believing him. One day the wolf really came. The shepherd boy cried out for help but they thought he was just trying to fool them again and so did not run to help him and all the sheep were eagerly devoured by the wolf.



## Don't look a gift horse in the mouth

### Meaning

Don't complain if a gift is not up to your expectation.

### Usage

When Aunt Lara bought Cynthia a beautiful dress, she said she didn't like dresses with frills. I really think she shouldn't look a gift horse in the mouth.

### Origin

In the olden days, when horses were used for more than just riding, people would examine their teeth to check whether it was a young strong horse or an old one. But if you were gifted a horse by someone and you examined its teeth by looking at its mouth, then you would be hurting the feelings of the person who gifted it to you. In other words, it is better not to be too choosy or fuss about anything that comes to you as a gift.





## Eager beaver

### Meaning

Hardworking, industrious.

### Usage

Johnny always finishes his schoolwork before going out to play. In this aspect, Johnny is an eager beaver.

### Origin

For many centuries man has admired the beaver for its hardworking nature. The beaver swims in rivers and builds dams made of tiny wooden sticks across them. Come rain or shine, the beaver is always hard at his work. This saying became popular in the 17th Century.

## Go to the dogs

### Meaning

To be ruined, to fall from a great position.

### Usage

Our rich neighbour's fortune went to the dogs when his son spent all his money.

### Origin

In the medieval times, food that was spoilt or considered unfit for man, was given to the dogs. Soon man started ascribing this state to his fellow beings, to indicate that a person's state had become very bad, like that of a dog.



## Hold your horses

### Meaning

Slow down, be patient.

### Usage

When I am impatiently eating the ice cream, Grandpa tells me to hold my horses.

### Origin

Horse carts were used for travel in 19th Century America. When you wanted the cart driver to slow down, you had to tell him to rein in his steeds, in other words, "Hold your horses." Soon this expression came to be applied to life too, and if you want anybody to slow down or be a little patient all you need to say is "Hey! Hold your horses!"



## Let the cat out of the bag

### Meaning

To give away or let out a secret.

### Usage

We were planning to bake a cake as a surprise for my mother's birthday, but little Tim told my mother and let the cat out of the bag.

### Origin

This is what happened in a market many centuries ago in England. A favourite country trick used to be to substitute a cat for a pig at markets. If you let the cat out of the bag, you disclosed the trick and people avoided buying the pig. From then on, if anybody let the cat out of the bag, it was said that they were spilling a secret!





## Make a mountain out of a molehill



### Meaning

To make anything sound or look larger than it actually is.

### Usage

When Uncle Benny catches a cold he says he has a raging fever. He's always making a mountain out of a molehill.

### Origin

This saying originated in ancient Greece but not in its present form. When people began using it in England much later, they put in the words beginning with 'm' just so that it would be easy to remember and fun to use.

## Monkey business

### Meaning

Fooling around, silly behaviour.

### Usage

When Harry was fooling around in class, the teacher looked sternly at him and said, "No more monkey business young man, or you will be out of the class!"

### Origin

Have you seen a monkey? It always jumps around and acts like it is mad. Nobody knows where this saying comes from but to understand its meaning just look at a monkey. Did you also know that this expression also meant doing something that is dishonest? So if you caught somebody cheating, you could say to them, "That's enough now! No more monkey business!"



## Raining cats and dogs

### Meaning

To rain very heavily.

### Usage

Johnny cannot go out to play today because it is raining cats and dogs.

### Origin

In the 17th Century in England, there were heavy rainstorms and sometimes cats and dogs would drown and would be found lying dead on the roads after the rains. It almost looked like it had been raining cats and dogs.



## Rats abandoning a sinking ship

### Meaning

Disloyal people.

### Usage

When the company started to lose money, the employees resigned and left like rats abandoning a sinking ship.

### Origin

In the 16th Century sailors had many superstitions. One of them was that if you saw rats leaving a ship when it was docked in the harbour, it meant that the ship would drown on its journey. In the sailors' minds the rats were supposed to be loyal to the ship, as it had provided them with a home and food. Anyone who changes sides or becomes disloyal is therefore referred to as a rat abandoning a sinking ship.



## Smell a rat

### Meaning

To be suspicious or get a feeling that something is wrong.

### Usage

On observing the thief's actions, the policeman smelt a rat and realised that the thief was lying and up to something foul.

### Origin

This saying was used as early as the 16th Century. Man has always considered rats as dirty, smelly creatures. Even a cat, which suspects that a hole is occupied, will smell to see if it houses a rat. Soon this practice of the cat caught on to imply that if you sniff out something bad, you could "smell a rat"!



## Straight from the horse's mouth

### Meaning

Get some news directly from the person concerned.

### Usage

My uncle is planning to take us out to the beach and has told no one about the plan, besides me. So, I have got it straight from the horse's mouth.

### Origin

The best way to find a horse's age is to take a look at the horse's teeth and mouth. So, rather than asking the seller of the horse about the beast's condition, health, age etc., all you need to do is to look straight into the horse's mouth.



## Catch the bull by its horns

### Meaning

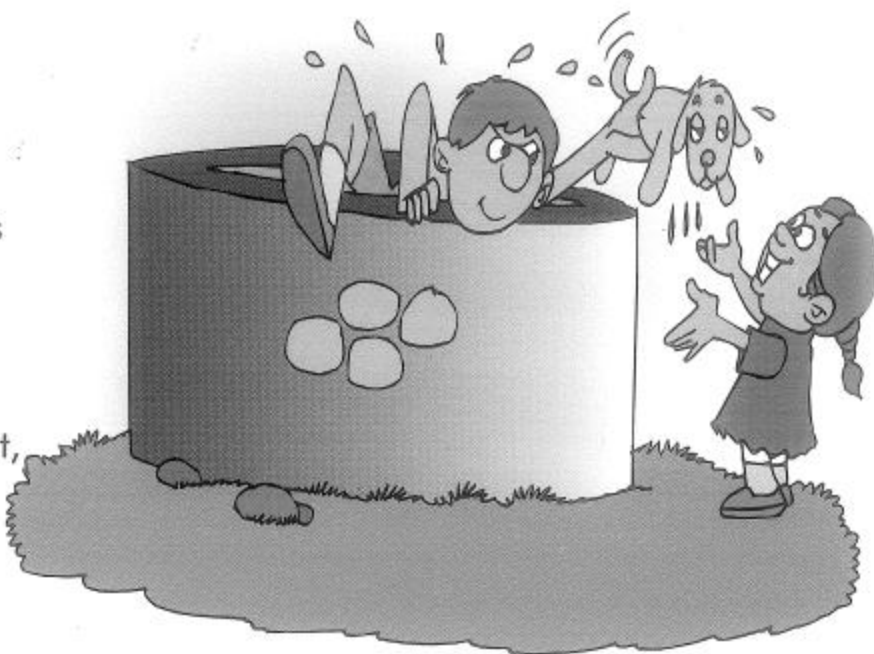
To be brave in a frightening or dangerous situation.

### Usage

Jeremy caught the bull by its horns when he dived into the well to save the drowning dog.

### Origin

Sometimes at the end of a bullfight, the bullfighter will wrestle the bull by taking hold of its horns. A very brave and daring act indeed! This saying therefore, originated from the land of bullfights, i.e. Spain!



## Wolf in sheep's clothing

### Meaning

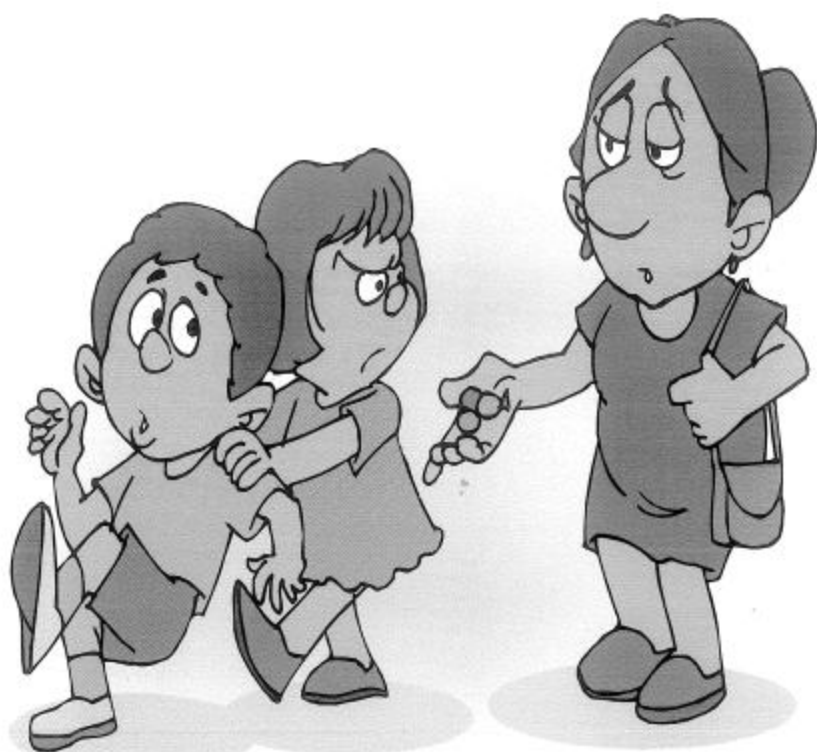
Someone who looks harmless but may actually be very dangerous.

### Usage

Never trust strangers on the street, for they may be wolves in sheep's clothing!

### Origin

In a story by Aesop, the famous Greek storyteller, a hungry wolf killed a sheep and wore its skin to get to the flock of sheep and kill some more. The sheep all thought that the wolf was also one of them. The dangerous wolf hid under the sheep's skin and managed to fool the flock!







Birds have fascinated us from time immemorial. Winged creatures that take flight, smooth as silk, flapping their wings, soaring, chirping, singing... no wonder that we have taken a close look at their antics and captured their personalities in our language...

## A bird in hand is worth two in the bush

### Meaning

Be content with what you have, because sometimes if you seek more, you might lose what you already have.

### Usage

Johnny had two cookies, but was greedy for more. When he reached for the cookie jar, his dog ate the cookies he had and also the jar slipped from his hands and broke. Now, he had no cookies. He should have known that a bird in hand is worth two in the bush.

### Origin

This saying is from ancient Greece and the great storyteller Aesop used it in one of his fables to explain to people how greed can only lead to sorrow. The Romans used it too. It must have come from the bird hunting parlance - where a bird you had caught was worth more than the two that were still sitting in the bush.



## Albatross around your neck

### Meaning

A burden or a weight that's hard to get rid of.

### Usage

My bag is like an albatross around my neck and I have to carry it around everywhere.

### Origin

Firstly, an albatross is a large bird with long wings. Have you read the poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by the British poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge? In this poem, a sailor shoots an albatross and it brings his whole ship a lot of bad luck. His angry shipmates tie the albatross around his neck in the hope that all the bad luck will stay only with him.



## As the crow flies

### Meaning

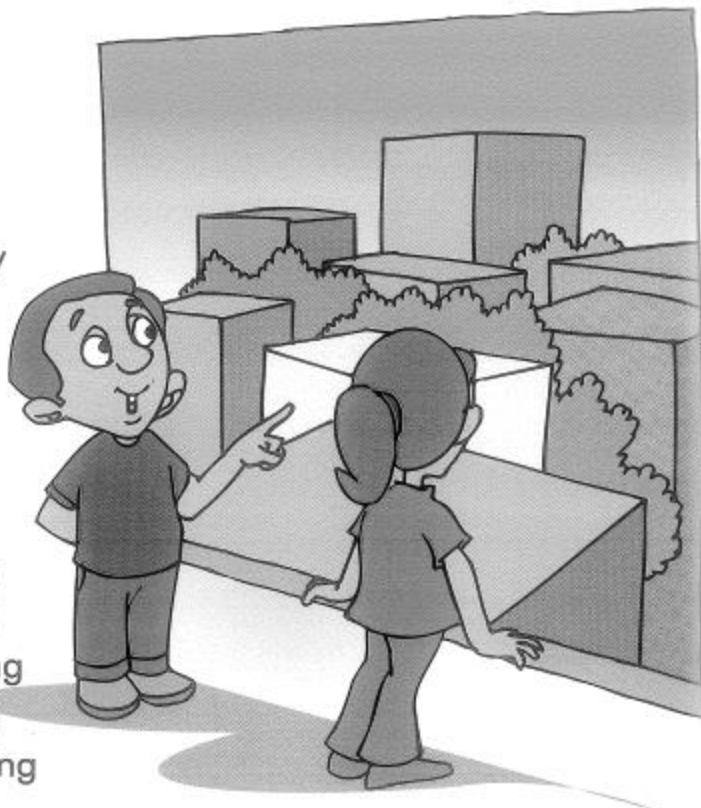
The shortest distance, in a straight line.

### Usage

The museum, though it seems far away is only hundred metres from my house as the crow flies!

### Origin

You must have noticed that birds always fly from one point to another in a straight line because that's the shortest distance. When we walk or run we have to go around curves and bends due to many man-made obstacles along our path and it's quite a roundabout way! The idiom therefore came into usage after observing the unobstructed flight of birds in the sky.



## Bats in your belfry

### Meaning

A crazy idea.

### Usage

Anthony wanted to straighten his dog's tail. He surely had bats in his belfry.

### Origin

A belfry is a tower with bells in it that are rung to warn the rest of the village of danger or to call a village meeting. A couple of centuries ago, even people's houses had a belfry. Since it is dark in the belfry, bats conveniently made this their home. It drove people crazy, as bats are nocturnal creatures and by flying about in the night inadvertently rang the bells!



## Chicken feed

### Meaning

A very small amount of money.

### Usage

My uncle is a librarian and he loves his job, even though they pay him chicken feed.

### Origin

The cheapest thing on a farm is the food they feed the chickens. So, if someone is paying you chicken feed for the work you do for him or her, then they must be paying you a really small sum of money.



## Cold turkey

### Meaning

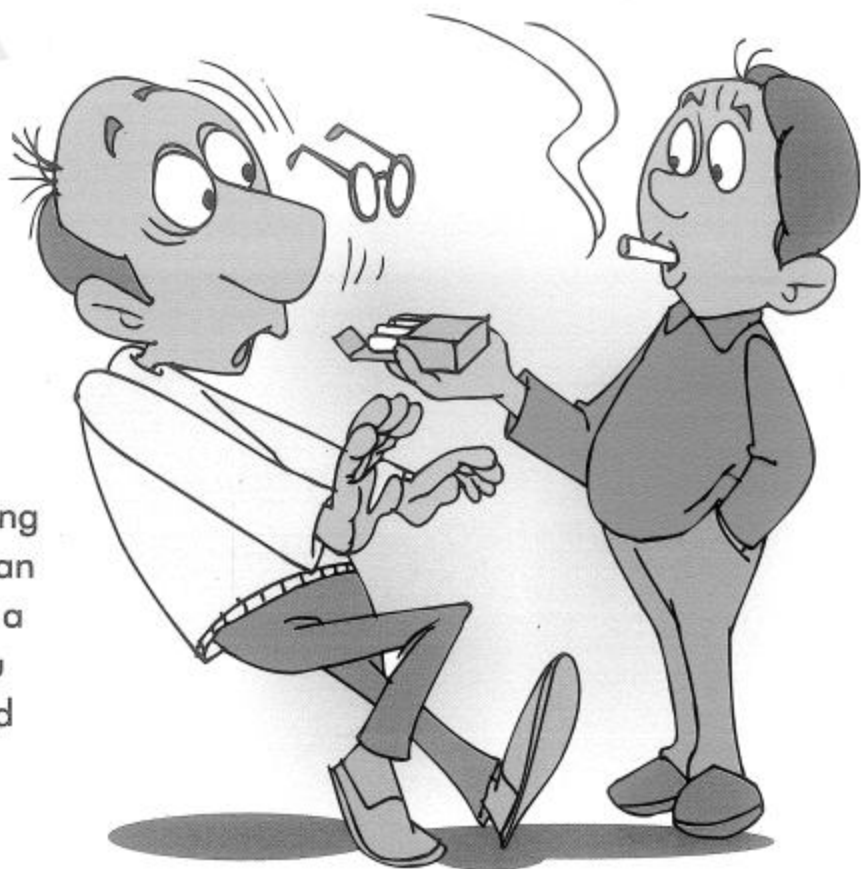
To suddenly quit an old habit.

### Usage

My grandfather used to smoke a lot but now he has turned cold turkey and kicked the habit!

### Origin

No one actually knows how this saying came to be! All we know is that it is an American saying that means to stop a bad habit. Any bad habit! And if you stop it cold in its tracks, you've turned cold turkey!



## Dead duck

### Meaning

A person who is cleaned out or is about to get caught for a mistake they made.

### Usage

Gary's mother told him to watch the milk, but he's a careless boy and it boiled over. Now, when his mother finds out, he is going to be a dead duck.

### Origin

This saying is about two centuries old and originated in Europe. What would happen to the duck if it were caught? It would be cooked and eaten. Similarly, anyone who made a mistake would be a dead duck, if they got caught.



## Don't count your chickens before they hatch

### Meaning

Don't dream about anything blindly.

### Usage

Warren spent all the money he had at the fair, thinking his Grandma would give him more, but she did not. Maybe he shouldn't have counted his chickens before they hatched?

### Origin

This idiom originates from the famous fable by Aesop, about the woman on the way to the market carrying a basket full of eggs. She then starts day dreaming about how many chickens she would have, if all the eggs hatched. And how many eggs they would lay and then how much money she would make and how rich she would be... And guess what! She tripped and dropped her basket and broke all her eggs. That's why you shouldn't dream about anything blindly.





## Early bird catches the worm



### Meaning

To achieve your goal by starting out early.

### Usage

Suzy scored high in her exams because she started preparing long before her classmates. The early bird does catch the worm!

### Origin

Imagine if you were a hen! You would have to get up really early and run if you wanted to catch worms to eat otherwise the other hens would eat them all up. Maybe, an observant farmer coined this idiom !

## Kill the goose that lays the golden eggs

### Meaning

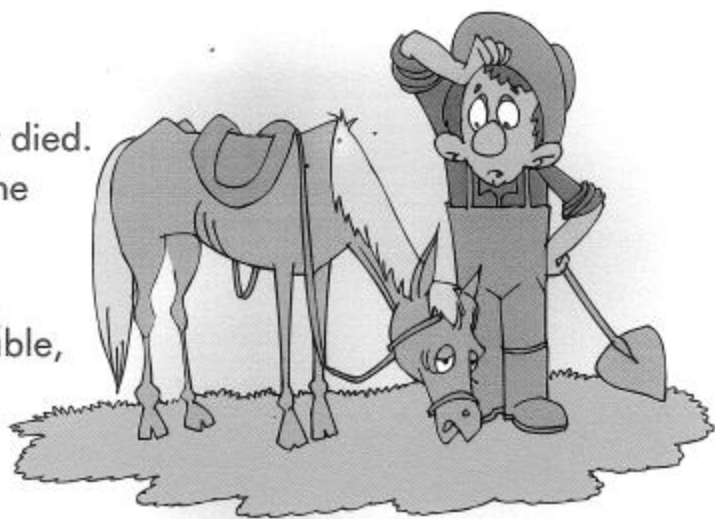
To destroy something out of greed that is useful to you continuously .

### Usage

To make more money faster, Joe the farmer, overworked his horse to such an extent that it died. He shouldn't have killed the goose that laid the golden eggs.

### Origin

This idiom originates from Aesop's famous fable, about a goose that laid a golden egg for its master everyday, till one day the farmer got greedy and wanted all the eggs at once. So, the farmer cut open it's stomach to get all the eggs and in the end all he had left was a dead goose and no eggs.



## Kill two birds with one stone

### Meaning

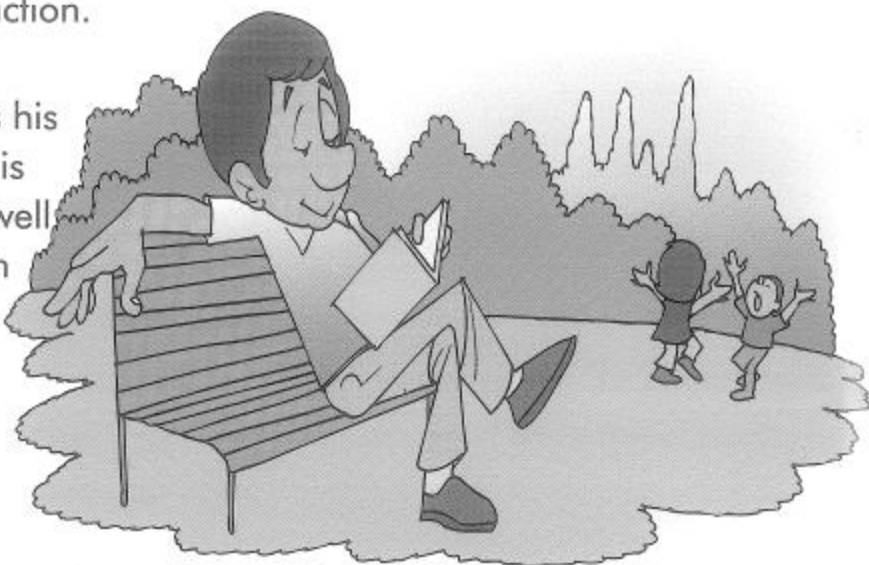
To accomplish two deeds with one action.

### Usage

Ivan is a smart man. When he takes his children to the park, he also takes his book along so that he can read as well as keep a watch over his children. In this way, he kills two birds with one stone.

### Origin

In the olden days man hunted with stone weapons. He hunted birds in the trees by throwing rounded stones and if he was lucky that there were many birds in the tree, the stone would hit more than one bird. Today, this saying refers to trying to accomplish more than one thing at a time.



## Scarce as a hen's teeth

### Meaning

Very rare to find.

### Usage

Winter berries are as scarce as a hen's teeth in the summer!

### Origin

Have you seen a hen with teeth? It's impossible because hens do not have any teeth! They grind the food in their stomachs. So, anything that's as impossible as finding a hen with teeth, is expressed this way.



## Sitting duck

### Meaning

In a position where one can be easily hurt.

### Usage

The deer ran out of the tall grass. In the open, it was like a sitting duck for the lion.

### Origin

To hunt ducks one has to be really quiet and patient. Then, one takes aim at a sitting duck because it is easier to shoot at it than a duck that is flying. So, anyone who is in a position similar to the duck that is going to be shot, is called a sitting duck.



## What's good for the goose is good for the gander

### Meaning

All the people in one group should be treated equally.

### Usage

If women are not allowed to fly planes then neither should men. What's good for the goose is good for the gander!

### Origin

A gander is a male goose and whatever the gander gets, the goose should also get since they are both the same specie. It just means that there should be no partiality. In the early days this could have implied equality of the sexes, but now it just means any two people.



## Wild goose chase

### Meaning

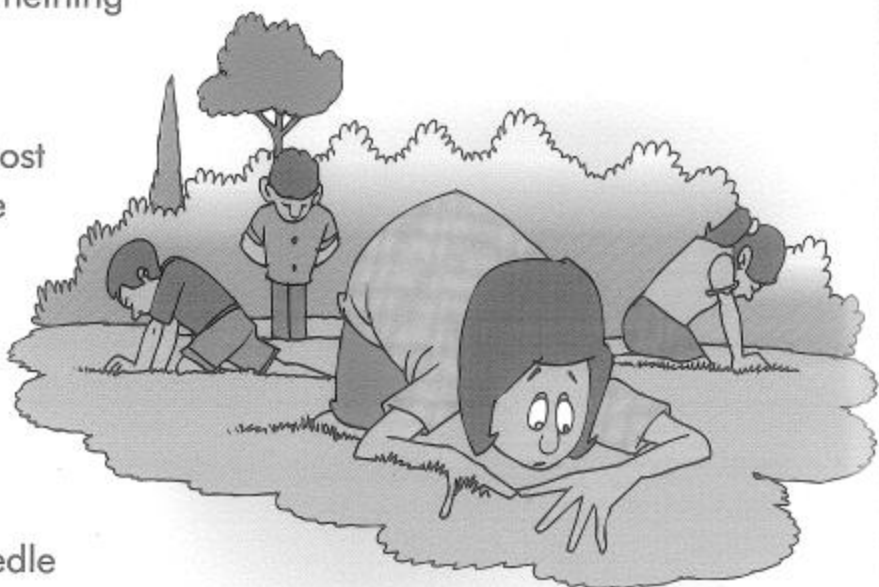
A useless or hopeless search for something that cannot be found.

### Usage

Trying to find the ring that Cynthia lost in the garden was a real wild goose chase.

### Origin

William Shakespeare, the famous playwright, used this saying in one of his plays. Trying to catch a wild goose by chasing it around is very difficult. It's like trying "to find a needle in a haystack!" Now, that's another idiom for you!



## Ugly duckling

### Meaning

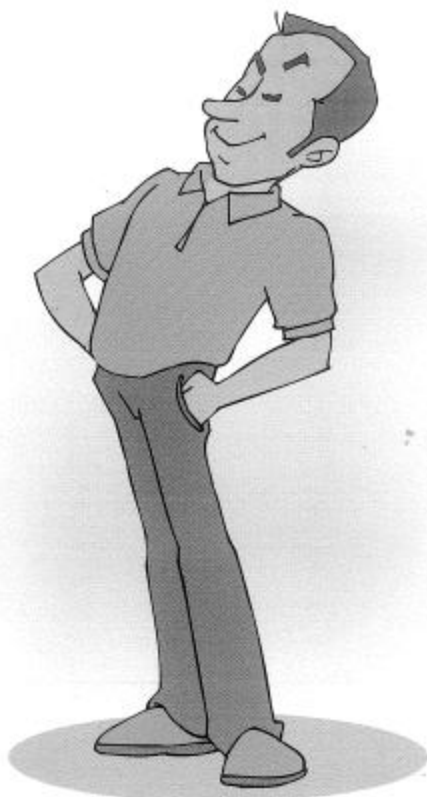
Anything that starts out looking ugly but turns out to be beautiful.

### Usage

Ashley was a shabby child and was referred to as an ugly duckling. However, he is all grown up now and looks so handsome.

### Origin

Heard the story of the ugly duckling? There was an ugly duckling that was very sad because its friends would not play with it. One day, it looked into the water and found that it had grown into a beautiful swan. This tells us that we shouldn't judge anything too soon. We should wait and watch and it might grow into something very beautiful!





# CLOTHES

Down the ages, man has attired himself in as much finery as he can afford. We all love clothes, with frills and ruffles, bibs and bell sleeves, capes and cloaks... so it's no wonder that just as clothes enrich our lives, they add a little class to our language too... in a manner of speaking, that is!



## Ace up your sleeve

### Meaning

A secret advantage.

### Usage

Our team hasn't scored a single goal till now, and our coach is still smiling. I think the coach has an ace up his sleeve that will help us win the game.

### Origin

Have you seen a magician perform? He pulls out everything from rabbits to cards from his sleeves! Even in card games, players hide a few cards up their sleeves to cheat and win a game. Having an ace up your sleeve is like having a secret weapon that you can use when the time comes.



## At the drop of a hat

### Meaning

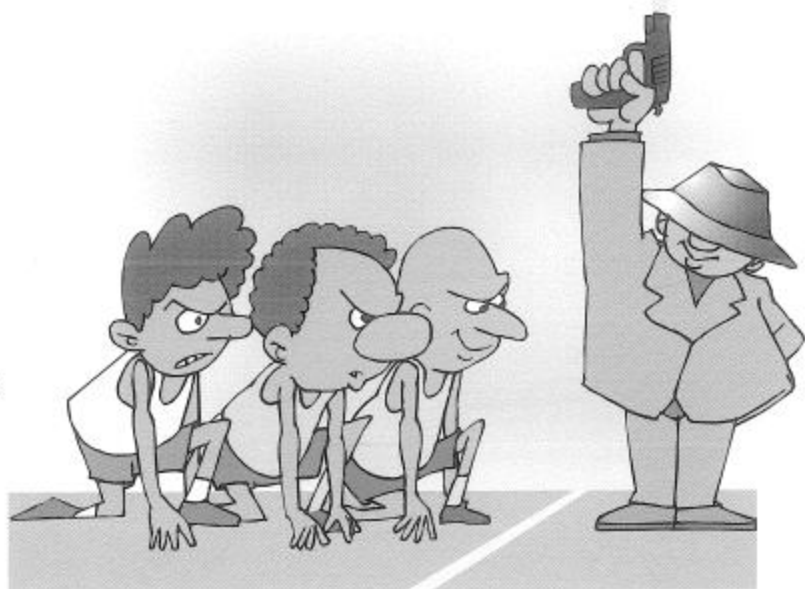
At once, immediately.

### Usage

All the runners were crouched, ready to run at the drop of a hat.

### Origin

Races have been started in many ways, sometimes the firing of a gun and at other times the waving of a handkerchief. A long time ago, it was the dropping of a hat that signaled the start of a race. At the drop of a hat means to do something immediately.



## Bee in your bonnet

### Meaning

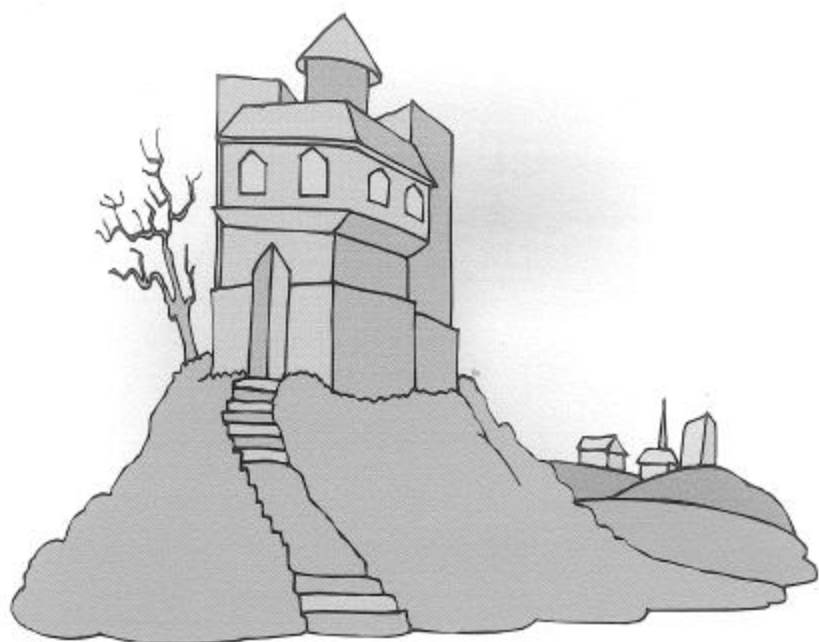
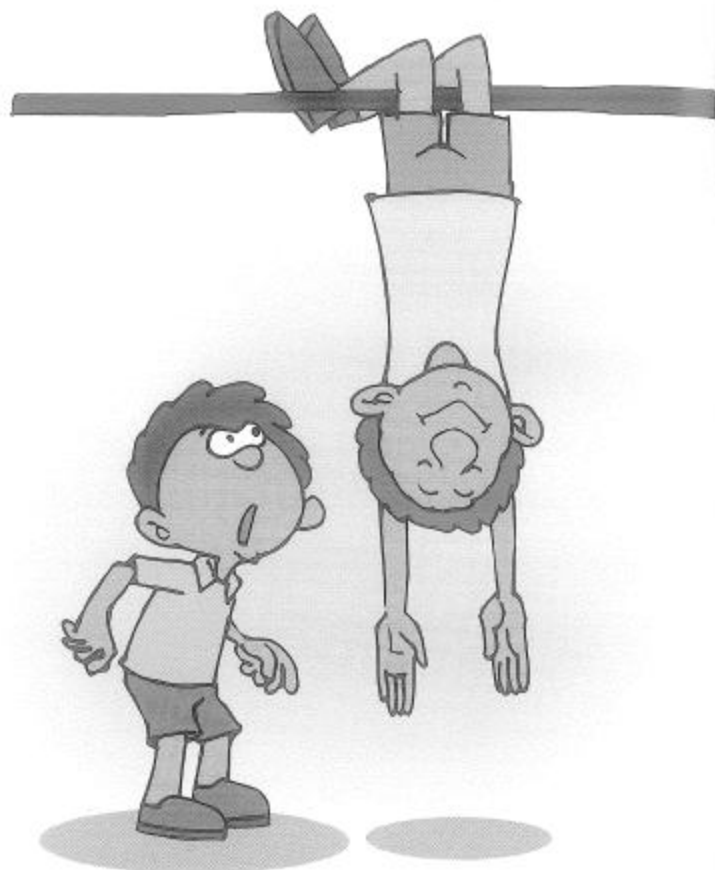
A crazy idea.

### Usage

Lewis thinks that hanging upside down can make him taller. He has a bee in his bonnet about growing taller this way.

### Origin

A long time ago, in Britain, women wore colourful decorated hats called bonnets. The bonnets would be decorated with flowers and as we all know where there are flowers, there will be buzzing bees. So, if you had a crazy idea in your head, it was like having a bee in your bonnet.



## Cloak and dagger

### Meaning

Mysterious.

### Usage

Nobody in town knows what goes on in Mr. Hyde's house. It is believed that he is into some cloak and dagger business.

### Origin

A very long time ago spies used to wear cloaks to hide weapons like daggers and swords. Since they looked very mysterious dressed in cloaks, anything that was mysterious and unknown was then referred to as cloak and dagger.

## Dressed to kill

### Meaning

Dressed to attract attention.

### Usage

The prince was dressed to kill and as he walked into the ball, everyone was eyeing him.

### Origin

Even today people give a lot of importance to clothes. Sometimes they also judge others by the way they are dressed. In times gone by, if someone was really well dressed and looked smart, people considered that his or her clothes were so good that they had killed everyone else's looks. Like he was dressed to kill!



## Eat your hat

### Meaning

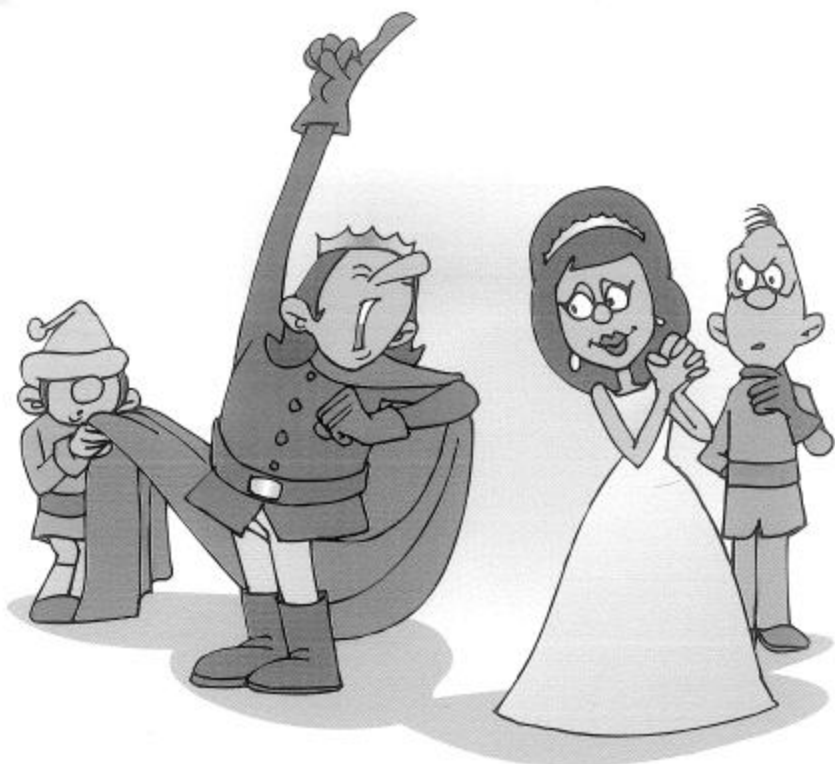
Saying that you will do something impossible if your words are proven wrong.

### Usage

The prince swore that he would win the princess' hand in marriage or eat his hat.

### Origin

It's impossible to eat your hat! So, it's like saying that you will do something impossible such as eating your hat if the words you have spoken are proved wrong.



## Feather in your cap

### Meaning

A great achievement.

### Usage

When Aunt Elsie got the award for inventing her new machine, it was like a feather in her cap.

### Origin

In America, native American Indians still wear head-dresses to respect their old traditions. And the more the number of feathers in an Indian warrior's cap, the more his achievements had been. Having a feather in your cap means having achieved something great.



## Give someone the shirt off your back

### Meaning

To be generous and kind hearted, to be selfless.

### Usage

Mr. Brown would give the shirt off his back for these poor kids because he knows the difficulties one has to face when poor.

### Origin

If you were walking down a street and saw a man who was cold and shirt-less, what would you do? Would you give him your shirt to wear and leave yourself cold? Since this is a very generous act and very few people would do it, "giving the shirt off your back" means being extremely generous.





## Goody two shoes

### Meaning

Anyone who thinks that they are perfect.

### Usage

Frankie always acts like he is superior to all of us. It's because he is such a goody two shoes that no one likes him.

### Origin

Do you know the story of the girl with one shoe on her foot? She wandered around wearing one shoe, so that anyone who noticed, pitied her and gave her another shoe. Then, as soon as she put on both shoes, she started showing them off to everyone she met and thought that she was just perfect. Ever since, anyone who shows off is called a goody two shoes.



## Handle with kid gloves

### Meaning

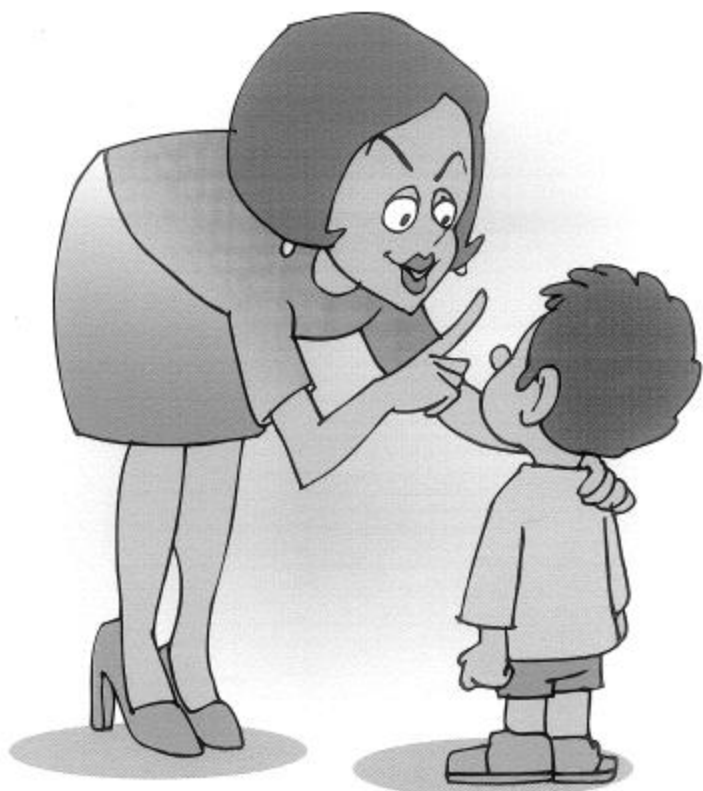
To treat very carefully and gently.

### Usage

Junior was a very weak child and fell sick easily, therefore he had to be handled with kid gloves, to protect him from falling sick.

### Origin

I'm sure you know that a young goat is called a kid. Its skin is very soft and smooth. If you were wearing gloves made from its skin, you wouldn't damage anything that you touch. In a similar way, when we have to handle something in life very carefully, it is referred to as to handle with kid gloves.



## Put on the wooden overcoat

### Meaning

To die.

### Usage

My cat Tom was very sick as he was very old. Yesterday, he finally put on the wooden overcoat and I buried him in the garden.

### Origin

Now surely if there were an overcoat made out of wood no one would be able to put it on. The wooden overcoat in this idiom refers to the wood of a coffin. It is a gentle way of saying that one is dead. When people died, they were buried in coffins, and hence termed as having put on their wooden overcoats.



## Keep your shirt on

### Meaning

To be cool and calm, to not get agitated.

### Usage

The two teams were so angry with each other and it looked like they were going to fight. Thankfully, the referee mediated and told them to keep their shirts on.

### Origin

I'm sure you have noticed that when people fight, they take their shirts off because it's very hard to move your hands to punch if you are wearing a shirt. That's why boxers fight bare-chested. Keeping your shirt on is to keep calm and not get into a fight.



## Make a silk purse out of a sow's ear



### Meaning

Trying to make something valuable from something worthless.

### Usage

Howard's shoes are old and cracked, but he's shining them in the hope that they will look new. Now isn't that trying to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear?

### Origin

A female pig is called a sow, and many of us still think that a pig is a very dirty creature. To make a silk purse, one needs silk which is very valuable. One definitely cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear! So, making a silk purse from a sow's ear is what we say to anyone who tries to make something extraordinary from a worthless thing.

## Old hat

### Meaning

Not very new, quite old, uninteresting.

### Usage

Mom said we would go to the beach this summer, because a mountain camp was such old hat.

### Origin

An old hat is dusty, dirty and is not very fashionable to wear. People usually prefer replacing old and unfashionable things with new ones. So, we say that anything which is not new and now uninteresting, is old hat.



## On a shoestring budget

### Meaning

Surviving a longer period with meager means.

### Usage

The woodcutter and his wife built their little house on a shoestring budget.

### Origin

A shoestring just means a shoelace. It is not given much importance and doesn't cost very much. Like buying a shoestring isn't a very expensive affair and anything that involves very little money is referred to in this way. This idiom originated in America in the 1800's.



## Pass the hat

### Meaning

To beg, to ask for a contribution.

### Usage

When the poor blacksmith's family was left homeless, they had no other way than to pass the hat around and get money from others.

### Origin

Entertainers on the streets still pass their hats around to collect money from the crowd of spectators. In some places, people begging on the street also hold out their hats for others to drop some money into. Passing the hat around is a way of asking for help in a desperate financial situation.







## Stuffed shirt

### Meaning

Anyone who arrogantly thinks that he is very important.

### Usage

Mr. Remington ignores everyone and has no friends. He is such a stuffed shirt.

### Origin

Anyone who acts as if they are very important and expects others to pay them attention, is called a stuffed shirt. But, what's the shirt stuffed with? It's stuffed with pride and self-importance!

## Take off your hat to someone

### Meaning

To admire or appreciate someone.

### Usage

My father is an excellent cook, even after a hard day at work, he comes home and cooks for all of us. I take my hat off to him.

### Origin

The most important part of the attire in the 18th and the 19th Century was the hat. And if you lifted your hat to someone, it meant that you were greeting him or her warmly or that you appreciated something they had done. Nowadays, it's much simpler; we just smile or express our appreciation with words.



## Throw in the towel

### Meaning

To give up, to admit defeat.

### Usage

After running twenty laps, the ace runner was still trailing far behind. He then threw in the towel and walked off disappointed.

### Origin

In a boxing match, each boxer has a second, a man who is standing around holding towels and sponges. In the latter part of the 19th Century, when one of the boxers had had enough of the fight and could not go on anymore, his manager or second would throw something into the ring, like a sponge or a towel, to indicate that he was quitting.



## Wet blanket

### Meaning

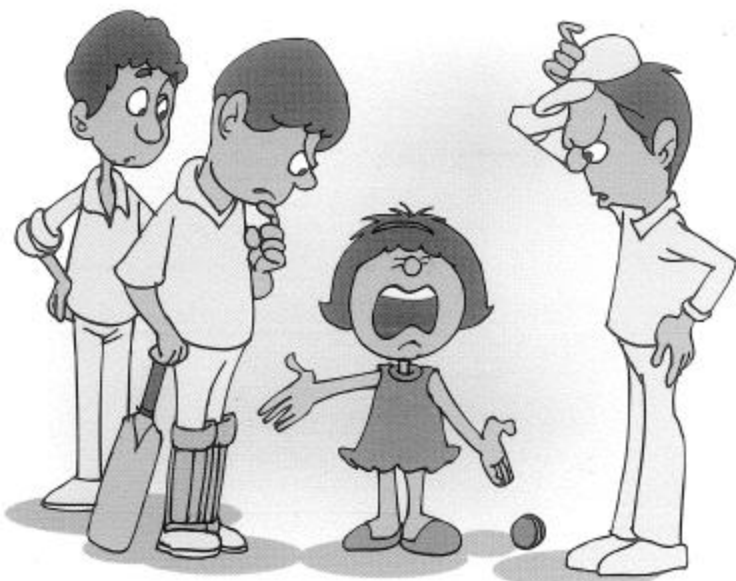
A person who spoils all the fun.

### Usage

My kid sister keeps complaining and crying all the time and never lets anyone have any fun. She's such a wet blanket.

### Origin

It's so much fun when you go camping and sit around the campfire telling each other stories! Well, throwing a wet blanket over the campfire naturally puts it out! It's almost like spoiling all the fun you were having around the fire. So, a wet blanket is the name you give to someone who spoils all the fun.



# COLOURS

Ever wondered what the world would be like without colour? Imagine no blue sky, no red tomatoes, no green leaves, and no yellow sun... Ah! What a dull place it would be... no wonder that colour has crept into our language too, brightening every sentence we speak or write... giving our language every hue under the sun!



## Blue blood

### Meaning

Of high or noble birth.

### Usage

Mr. Spencer got engaged to a very rich and classy lady. She comes from a royal family having blue blood!

### Origin

A long time ago in Spain, people who were very rich like kings and queens, had a test to determine if someone was of noble birth. They would look at the arms and legs and see if their blood was blue. Actually if you have very fair skin, your veins will show through the skin and veins are blue. Since these people were not used to working in the sun and lived a life of luxury inside their palaces, their skin would be extremely fair and their veins very blue!



## Bolt from the blue

### Meaning

Something sudden or unexpected.

### Usage

When the messenger brought the news of the king's sudden death, it hit the queen and the people of the nation like a bolt from the blue.

### Origin

Imagine, if you were looking peacefully at a clear blue sky and without a warning a bolt of lightning cracked right in front of you. Wouldn't that be unexpected?



## Catch someone red-handed

### Meaning

Catch someone at the time when they are doing something wrong.

### Usage

Jeremy was caught red handed by his mother, while he was stealing some cookies from the jar.

### Origin

Imagine being caught while you were murdering someone. Your hands would be red with blood and that would prove your guilt. Catching someone exactly when they are doing something wrong, is called catching them red-handed!



## Every cloud has a silver lining

### Meaning

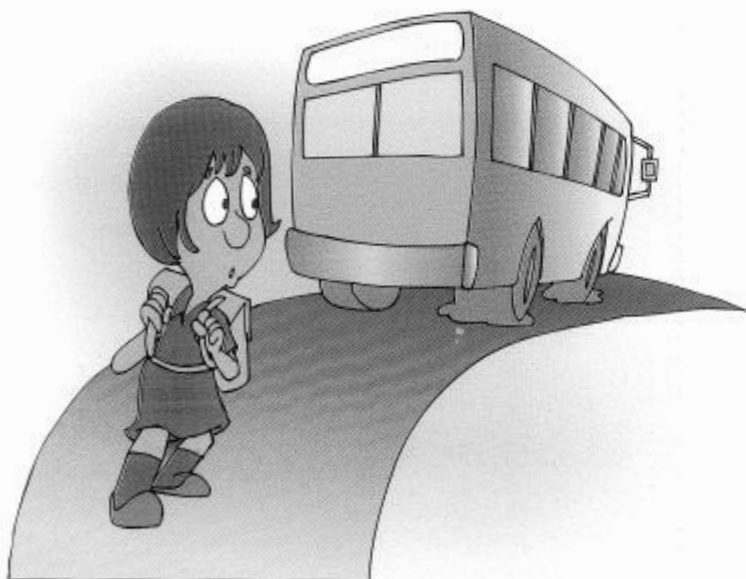
There is something good in any situation, no matter how bad it may seem.

### Usage

Even after missing the bus to school, Rita reached school on time as the bus had a breakdown on the way. Therefore, we say that every cloud has a silver lining!

### Origin

Have you ever seen a cloud with the sun behind it? The centre of the cloud is still dark and scary like its going to start pouring any minute, but the edges look silvery due to the sun's rays and give a feeling of warmth and safety.





## Get a pink slip

### Meaning

To lose your job.

### Usage

When Steve's boss found out that he was sleeping all day in office, he gave him the pink slip.

### Origin

Till a century ago, if someone lost their job they were given a pink dismissal slip to indicate that their services were no longer needed and that they could collect the money due to them and leave. So getting a pink slip just means losing your job.



## Green thumb

### Meaning

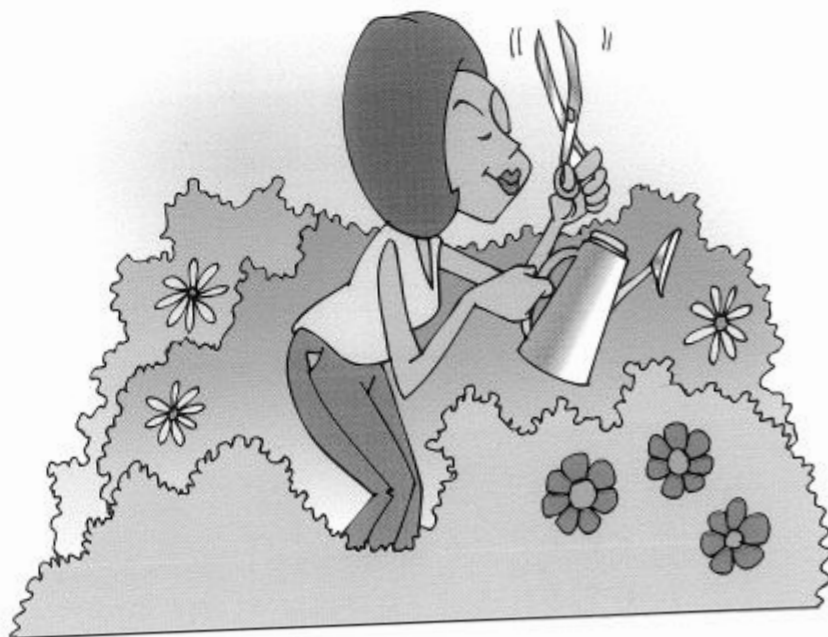
To have a talent for gardening.

### Usage

My aunt's garden is filled with colourful flowers. I guess she's got a green thumb.

### Origin

It is said that if you touch your plants lovingly and rub their leaves gently, give them a lot of affection and care, they grow fast and well. By touching your plants often, your thumbs and fingers would turn green with the pigment of the leaves, and that's how this idiom originated!



## Green with envy

### Meaning

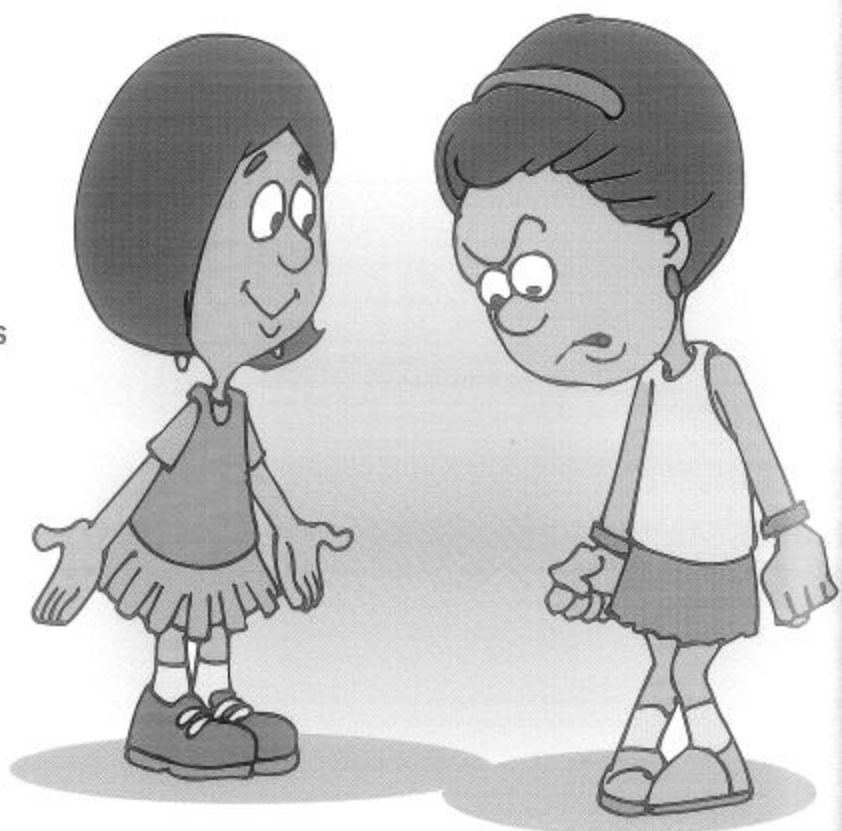
To be jealous.

### Usage

When Sarah saw my brand-new shoes, she was green with envy!

### Origin

Since the time of drawing on the walls of caves, man has used colour to describe his emotions. Like red for anger, blue for sadness, black for fear, pink for happiness and green for jealousy. Shakespeare also referred to jealousy as "the green sickness" in one of his famous plays.



## In the pink

### Meaning

To be in very good health.

### Usage

Though my grandfather is 98 years old, he's still in the pink of health.

### Origin

When we see someone with rosy pink cheeks, we tend to associate them with good health. In reality, what makes the skin look pink is the blood flowing under it. And if the blood flow is good, then the person is really healthy. So, pink cheeks are a sure sign of good health.

## Once in a blue moon

### Meaning

Very rarely.

### Usage

Nowadays, Daddy takes us camping only once in a blue moon.

### Origin

I am sure you have seen a white moon and sometimes a yellow moon and maybe a slightly greyish moon. But tell me have you ever seen a blue moon? Most probably not! In the same way, anything that happens very rarely is said to be happening once in a blue moon.



## Out of the clear blue sky

### Meaning

Without any warning.

### Usage

Maria's missing uncle came home one day, as if out of the clear blue sky!

### Origin

We have discussed a similar kind of saying before. Bolt from the blue. Anyway, they both mean the same thing. To be shocked or surprised without a warning!



## Red carpet treatment

### Meaning

To treat specially, giving a lot of respect.

### Usage

Mr. Hendricks must be a very important person. No matter where he goes, he gets a red carpet treatment.

### Origin

During the times of kings and queens, whenever someone important arrived at the palace a red carpet would be rolled out from their carriage to the door of the palace to show everyone how important they were. It meant welcoming someone warmly and treating him or her with respect.



## Red herring

### Meaning

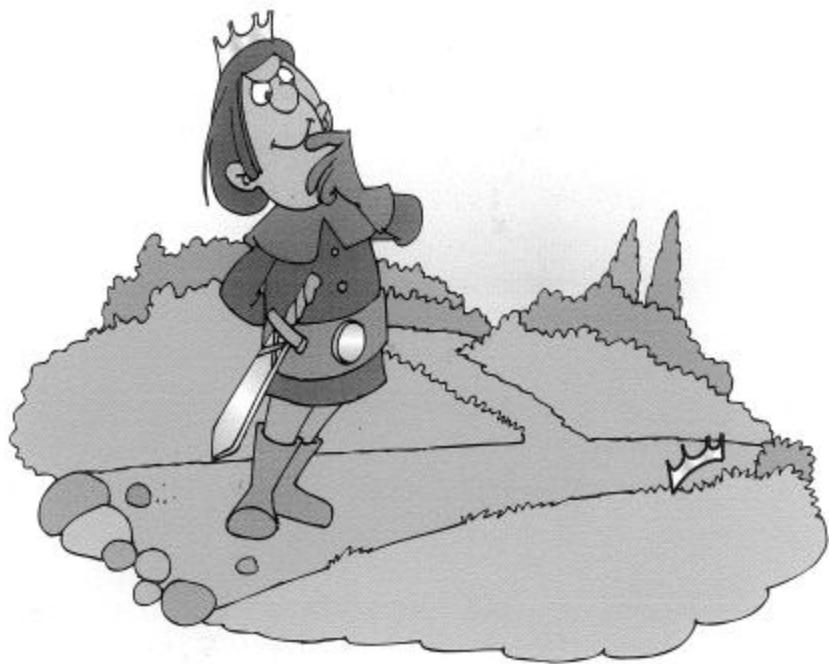
Anything that misleads you.

### Usage

The Prince planted obvious clues on the road leading out of the country to act as a red herring, while he fled from another route.

### Origin

Long ago, when hunting was a sport, people trained their dogs with pieces of red herring, which is a fish with a very strong smell. Dogs were also used to track down criminals who had escaped. Sometimes criminals would use the red herring to mislead the dogs. Ever since, this saying has been used to mean anything that misleads.





## Red-letter day

### Meaning

An important or very special day.

### Usage

The 14th of May is a red-letter day for my aunt because she got married on that day.

### Origin

Ever since the advent of calendars holidays, festivals, etc. were always marked in red. So, a red-letter day was a special day. Nowadays, if we talk about any important day, we say it's a red-letter day!



## Show your true colours

### Meaning

To show what you really are.

### Usage

Johnny boasted to his friends that he had fought lions and tigers but his true colours were shown, when he got scared of a small fox.

### Origin

In days gone by, pirate ships would hoist a colourful flag that was not their own, to cheat other ships to come closer. After the ship came close, they would hoist their own flag and rob them. Only after the pirates boarded the ship would their true identity be revealed.



## Tickled pink

### Meaning

To be very amused.

### Usage

Grandma was tickled pink when she saw her dog walking on its hind legs.

### Origin

When you are laughing really hard or when you are very happy, your face turns slightly pink or red because the blood rushes to your face and neck! Tickled pink means you are really amused.



## True blue

### Meaning

Very loyal, very faithful.

### Usage

Uncle Gerald's dog fought off the wolves and protected him. A dog is always true blue to the end.

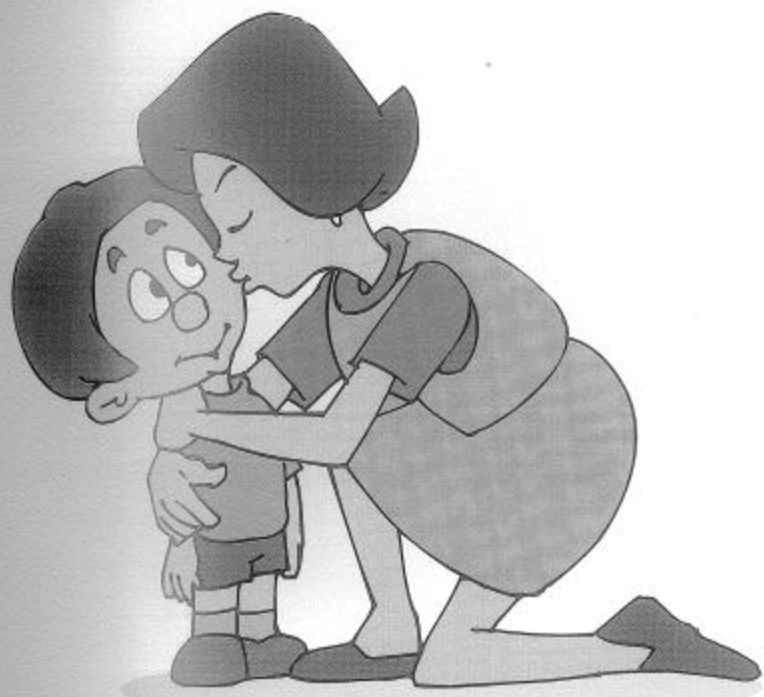
### Origin

True blue is the name of a dye from England, used to colour thread. It was in use until very recently, though now synthetic dyes are used. This particular dye was so good that no matter how long you used your clothes, the colour would never fade. Since it was so loyal to the cloth, any great loyalty is referred to as true blue.



# FOOD

Food, glorious food! We eat three square meals a day and what a variety we eat! Vegetables, meat, cereal, lentils... fried, stirred, roasted, baked, steamed, grilled... and when it's time for something special, what a spread we have on our tables... it's the same spread that we have brought into our language too! Thus we use all the goodness of food to nourish our language in more ways than one!



## Apple of your eye

### Meaning

A thing that is very precious to you.

### Usage

Robbie is such a fine child. It's no wonder that he's the apple of his mother's eye.

### Origin

In the past, the coloured round portion of our eyes that we call the pupil, was called the apple of the eye. This was due to its shape, which is like an apple. We would be blind without our pupils. Since the pupil is such an important part of the eye, anything that is very dear to us is called the apple of our eye.

## Bite off more than you can chew

### Meaning

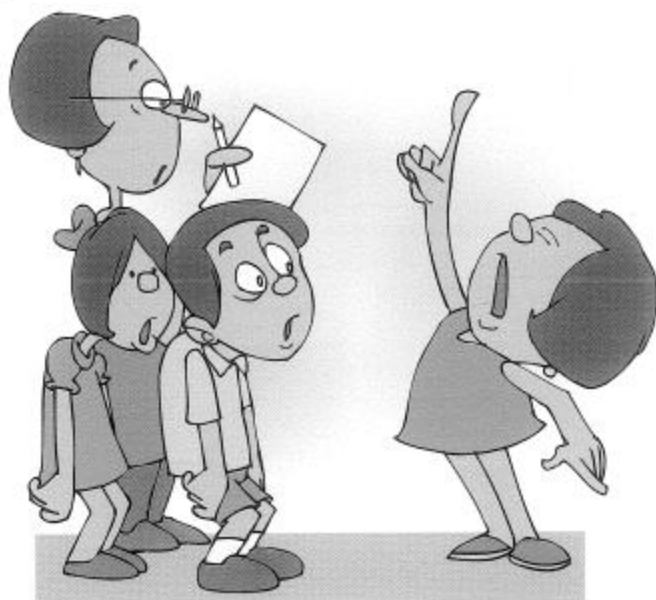
To try to do something that is beyond your capability.

### Usage

Joan declared that she would head all the committees for the school play. She always bites off more than she can chew.

### Origin

Ever tried to put a large piece of food in your mouth? First of all you would choke and even if you didn't choke you surely wouldn't be able to chew it. It is like trying to do something that is a bit beyond your capability.



## Cool as a cucumber

### Meaning

Not nervous, very calm.

### Usage

Even though Barry is scared of performing in front of a crowd, today he was as cool as a cucumber on the stage.

### Origin

Laying slices of cucumbers on your eyes or eating them in the summer gives a very cool feeling. Being cool is associated with being calm. So, if you say that someone is cool as a cucumber, it means that they are not a bit nervous.



## Crying over spilled milk

### Meaning

To worry about something that you cannot change.

### Usage

Ted is worried about the fish bowl that he accidentally broke but there is no use now crying over spilled milk.

### Origin

If you forget to keep an eye on the milk boiling in a vessel, then it will boil over and spill on the floor. You cannot put it back into the vessel by worrying or crying about it. So, this saying tells us to stop crying over mistakes that we cannot undo.





## Cut the mustard

### Meaning

To be able to handle a job.

### Usage

Walt is the shortest boy in his class and everyone thought that he couldn't cut the mustard. However, he surprised everyone by jumping the highest.

### Origin

In the 19th Century, people in America used the word mustard to mean the important scene in an act, the main course in a meal or the main attraction. Cutting the mustard meant, being able to handle the job given to you.



## Eat humble pie

### Meaning

To feel sorry or be apologetic about something.

### Usage

Harry boasted about scoring the highest marks in his class but when he saw the results, he had to eat humble pie.

### Origin

In the 14th and 15th Centuries, a pie was called "umble pie." Since it sounds like humble and humble means feeling humiliated, it was soon changed to eating humble pie and it meant being sorry about something.



## Finger in every pie

### Meaning

To play or have a part in everything.

### Usage

Gerry knows how to play the guitar, the violin, the flute and the drums. Looks like he has a finger in every pie!

### Origin

If you were to choose from twenty different pies what would you do? You would put your finger in every one of them to find out which one tasted better.



## Full of beans

### Meaning

To be strong and energetic.

### Usage

Even after running uphill for ten miles, Uncle Ned seems to be full of beans while the rest of us are dead tired.

### Origin

We all know that beans are full of proteins and energy. If someone ate a lot of beans, then we would expect them to be stronger than the rest of us. So, this idiom refers to people, who are very strong and energetic most of the time.



## Go bananas



### Meaning

To become crazy.

### Usage

In the middle of the night, my brother starts singing at the top of his voice. Looks like he has gone bananas.

### Origin

Monkeys eat a lot of bananas and we all think of monkeys as funny or crazy creatures. So going bananas means acting like a monkey or just acting crazy.

## In a nutshell

### Meaning

To explain in a short simple way.

### Usage

The science project was too tough for all of us but Mr. Schooner gave us the basics in a nutshell.

### Origin

Have you seen a nutshell? It is very small and the space inside it is even smaller. Saying it in a nutshell means saying it in very few words or making a thing that seems very complicated, incredibly simple.



## In a pickle

### Meaning

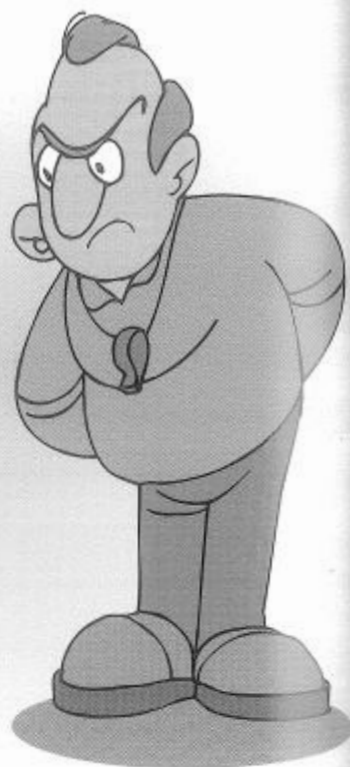
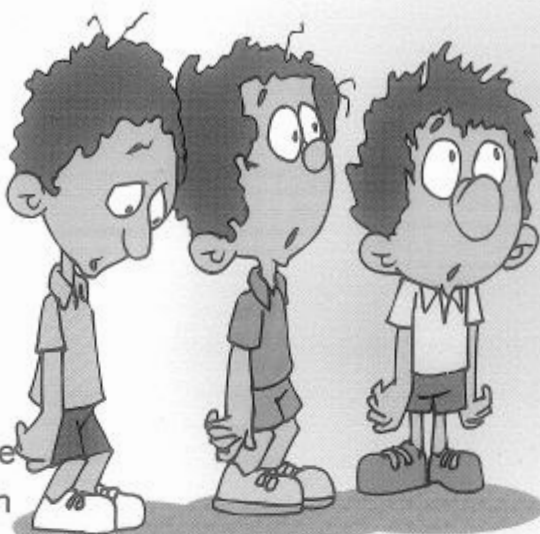
In trouble.

### Usage

Not only did the boys lose the game, they lost all their gear, too. They sure are in a pickle!

### Origin

If you have seen how pickles are made, you will know that the ingredients are boiled and soaked in oil and spices. Imagine, if you were in a pickle then you would have also been boiled and soaked. Now, that is a lot of trouble isn't it?



## Not your cup of tea

### Meaning

Something that is not of your taste or liking.

### Usage

Joan is very bad at tennis. It's just not her cup of tea.

### Origin

People in England are very particular about the tea that they drink. Even though there are so many varieties, they will not drink any other than the tea that they are used to. It's a matter of taste. So anything that you are not used to is just not your cup of tea.



## Nutty as a fruitcake

### Meaning

Crazy, mad, eccentric.

### Usage

Everybody in the country thought that Aunt Hilda was nutty as a fruitcake. She wore no warm clothes in the winter and put on two or three sweaters in the summer.

### Origin

First let me tell you what a fruitcake is! It is a cake made with dried fruits and a lot of nuts. Nut is a term we sometimes use to describe people who are crazy. And if someone is as nutty as the nuts in a fruitcake, then they must be really crazy.



## Out of the frying pan and into the fire

### Meaning

From a bad situation into one that is worse.

### Usage

Reggie escaped the bears but as he came out of the bush, the bees stung him. That's what I call out of the frying pan and into the fire.

### Origin

If you were in a frying pan, you would be in a lot of trouble. Imagine, how it would be if you accidentally fell into the fire next. That's like going from a bad situation to one that is worse.



## Piece of cake

### Meaning

An extremely easy thing to do.

### Usage

Making my breakfast is a piece of cake. I just toss in the corn flakes and pour in the milk.

### Origin

Eating a piece of cake is a very easy and enjoyable thing to do. Therefore, anything that is easy to do, is compared to the enjoyable experience of eating a cake.



## Sell like hot cakes

### Meaning

To sell very easily.

### Usage

The T-shirts we made for the fair were so beautiful that they sold like hot cakes.

### Origin

In the olden days hot cakes were sold at the local fairs. The cakes would sell very fast because they were so tasty and also because people wanted to eat them while they were still warm. So, anything that sells very fast is compared to selling like hot cakes.



## Spill the beans

### Meaning

To give away a secret.

### Usage

When the policeman threatened the thief, he spilled the beans about the house that he had robbed.

### Origin

In ancient Greece, people used to gather in secret clubs and when they had to vote they would drop beans into a jar. A black bean dropped would mean 'no' and a white would mean 'yes'. Others would sometimes expose whom they had voted for by overturning the jar and spilling the beans. Ever since, this saying has been used to refer to the act of giving away a secret.



## Take with a grain of salt

### Meaning

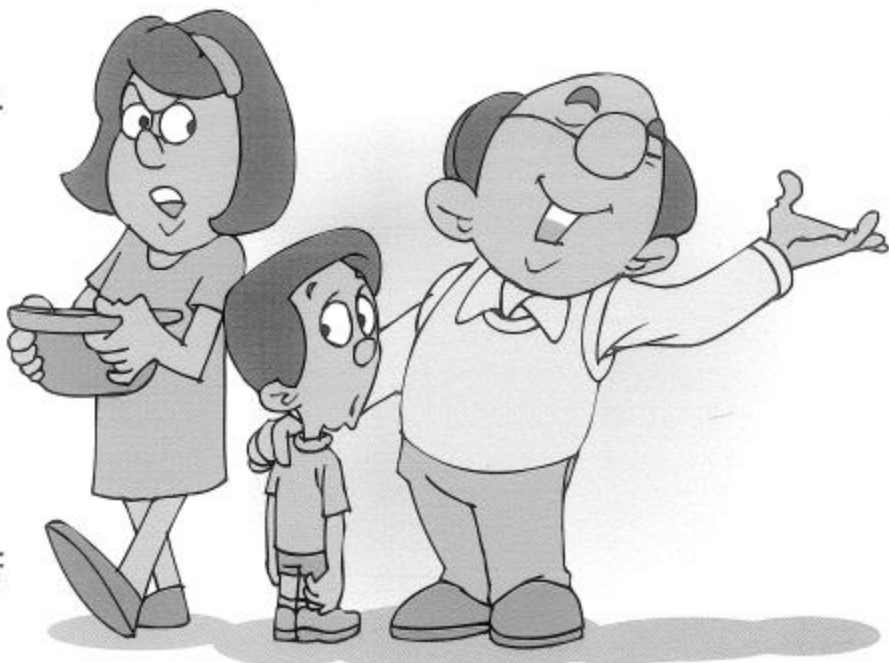
To accept something disbelievingly.

### Usage

My Uncle Stevie tells us such tall stories; Mother says that most of what he says must be taken with a grain of salt.

### Origin

In olden times, people considered salt to be an antidote to poison. So, taking anything with a grain of salt meant being on the safe side. Like not believing what someone says completely.



## Upset the apple cart

### Meaning

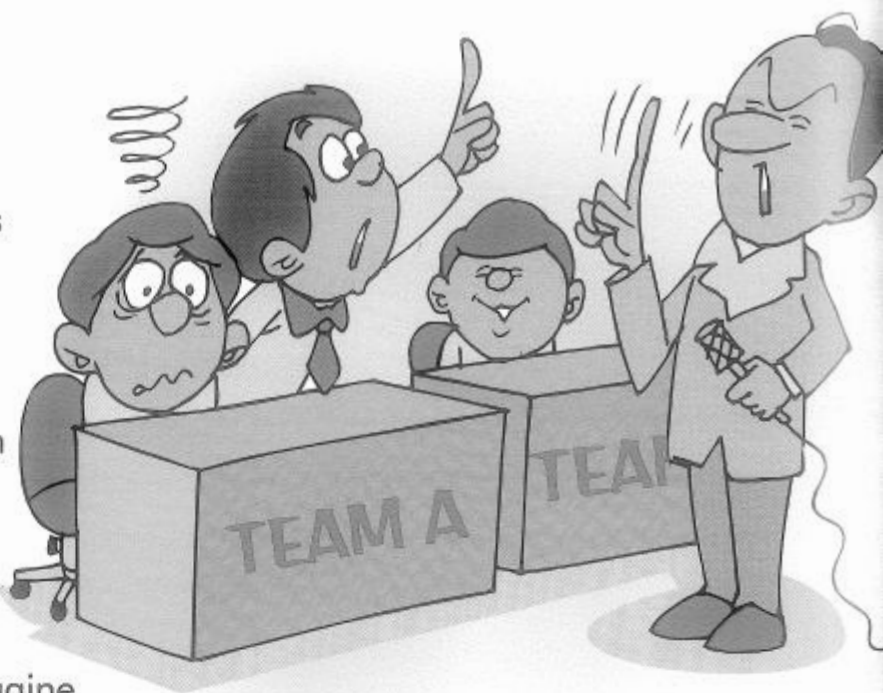
To spoil something completely.

### Usage

Our team had already guessed the answer in the quiz but Thomas upset the apple cart by answering out of turn.

### Origin

You must have noticed apples with brown patches in places. This happens when the apple falls or gets damaged. Well, everyone loves to eat apples. Damaging one apple is bad enough; just imagine someone upsetting a cart full of apples. What a waste of apples!



## Worth your salt

### Meaning

Proving that you deserve something.

### Usage

Though everyone thought that Jimmy was a coward, but he showed that he was worth his salt by going into the dark room, all by himself.

### Origin

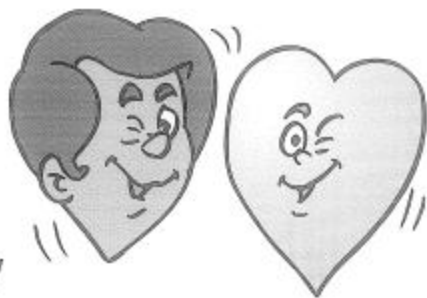
In the Roman army, the soldiers were paid salt as a part of their salary because it was so rare. So, if the soldiers fought bravely, they were proving that they were worth the salary that was being given to them, which was salt. Worth your salt ever since refers to proving yourself.





# HEAD & HEART

Think of your head and heart... can the body function without either of these two body parts? No way! These are the most important parts of our body. Not only do they perform their biological functions, we also associate a lot of emotions with them. Not surprising then, that we use them so extensively in our language... adding a lot of head and heart to English!



## Bury your head in the sand

### Meaning

To ignore danger.

### Usage

Aunt Jenny thinks that it's alright for Uncle Dave to smoke, but she's just burying her head in the sand.

### Origin

A long time ago, when people had just discovered ostriches and were beginning to study them, they observed that ostriches had their heads buried in the sand most of the time. This behaviour made people think that the ostriches were hiding from their enemies and were ignoring danger. In reality, ostriches search for berries and small grains in the sand to help them digest their food.



## Head honcho

### Meaning

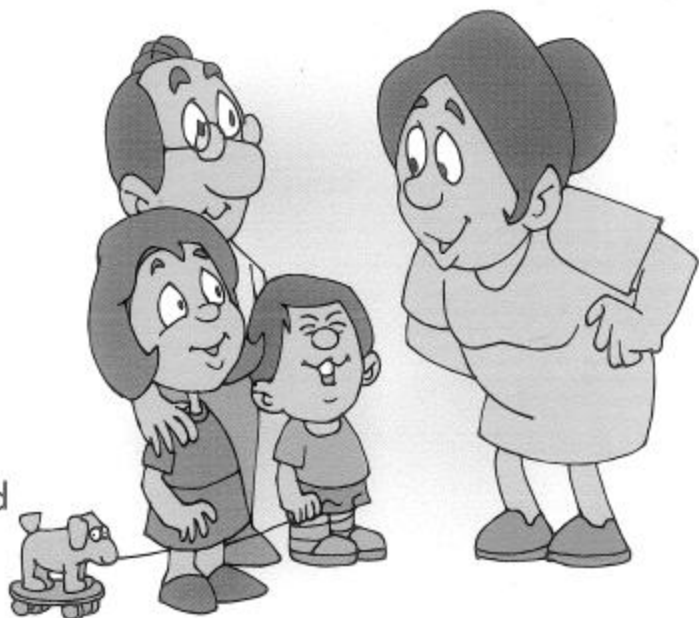
Person in charge, leader.

### Usage

In my family my mother is the head honcho who takes care of the entire household.

### Origin

During the Korean War, the invading American soldiers heard the Japanese word "hanchu" which means squadron leader. The Americans misspelled and mispronounced it and it finally became honcho. The word 'head' was added as it is an important part of the body and that is how the phrase 'head honcho' came to be.



## Head in the clouds

### Meaning

Lost in thought, daydreaming.

### Usage

Instead of working, Sara's head is always in the clouds and no one knows what she is dreaming about.

### Origin

In the early 17th Century it was first written, that if you were daydreaming then you were not aware of the goings-on on the Earth and your head was in the clouds. This is what happens to us when we daydream, we do not know what is going on around us because we are so taken up by our dreams.



## Head over heels in love

### Meaning

To fall helplessly in love.

### Usage

When the Beast saw Beauty, he fell head over heels in love with her.

### Origin

This saying originated in Ancient Rome. The Romans believed that when someone falls in love, their emotions turn upside down. So, a lot of sayings like 'head over heels in love' and 'bowed over' came to be because they all hint at being upside down.



## Hit the nail right on the head

### Meaning

To be correct or right.

### Usage

When Grandpa called Uncle a miser, Father told him that he had hit the nail right over the head, because Uncle never liked to part with his money, not even for his family.

### Origin

If you hit a nail right over it's head you will see that it goes right into the wood with one blow of the hammer. However, it is a very difficult task. So, hitting the nail right over the head means being right or correct.



## Off the top of your head

### Meaning

Saying something easily and quickly.

### Usage

Henry effortlessly recited the long poem right off the top of his head!

### Origin

We all know that thoughts come from the brain, which is at the top of our heads. So, if someone was giving answers off the top of their heads, it meant that they were using their brains well.



## Over your head

### Meaning

In a situation leading to failure.

### Usage

Maximus was in over his head in trying to fight the lion that was twice his size, but he kept on trying.

### Origin

When anything is over your head, it is out of your reach and hard to grab. Similarly, any situation in which you are surely going to lose is out of your reach and therefore over your head.



## Bleeding heart

### Meaning

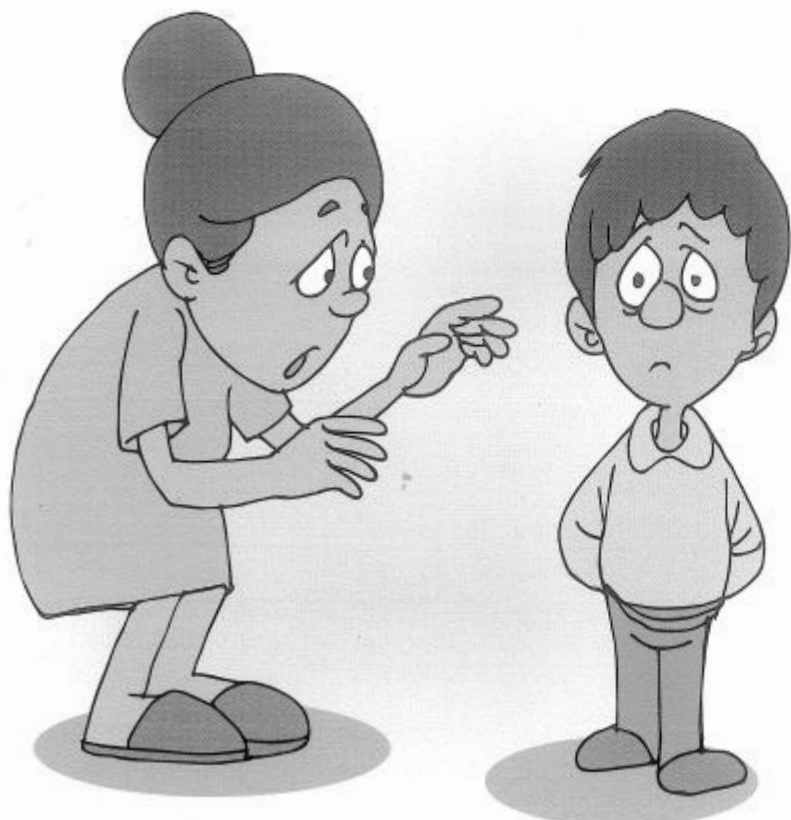
A soft-hearted person, who feels pity towards everyone.

### Usage

Nina is such a bleeding heart that if someone even puts on an expression of sorrow, she insists on helping them out.

### Origin

In the early 20th Century, some people believed that the government should do more to help the poor and needy. However, there were others who thought that all people should be independent and help themselves and referred to those who were interested in the poor and needy as bleeding hearts. Since the heart is the centre of our emotions, when we feel sorry for someone, it's almost like our hearts are bleeding for them.





## Eat your heart out

### Meaning

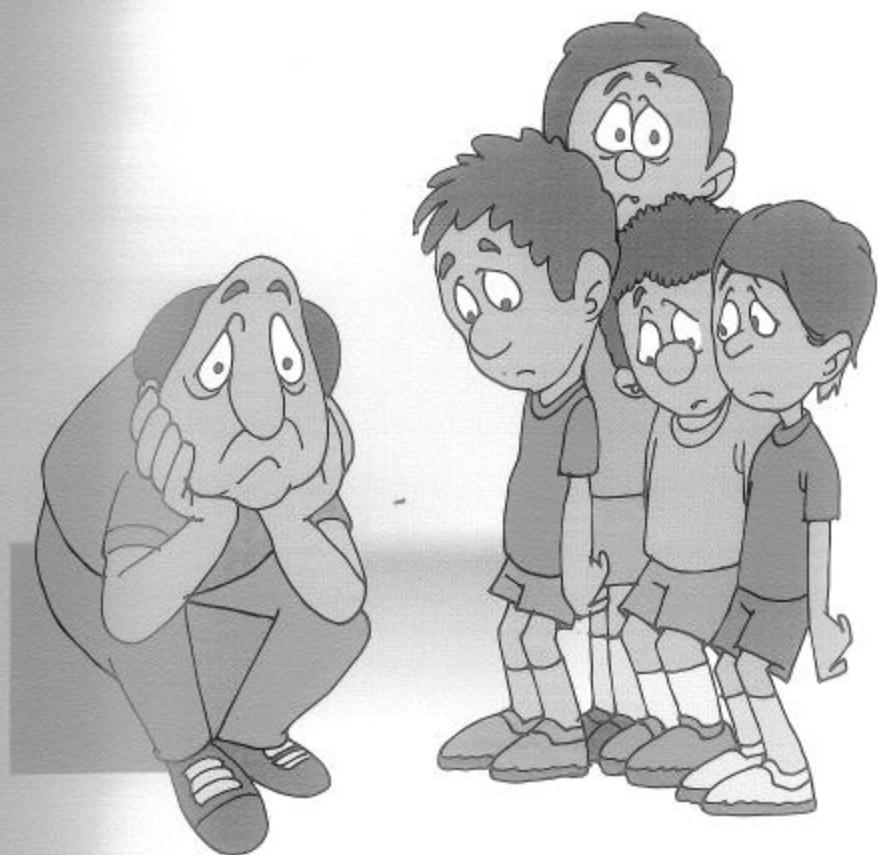
To be very unhappy.

### Usage

After the team lost the football match, the coach sat in a corner and ate his heart out.

### Origin

In the early days, people believed that the heart became smaller out of sadness, it was almost like whoever was unhappy had eaten their heart out, because we all know that if you eat an apple for example, it will get smaller with every bite.



## Have your heart in your mouth

### Meaning

To be scared or frightened.

### Usage

When Little Stewart jumped from the treetop into the pond, his mother had her heart in her mouth.

### Origin

Have you listened to the sound of your heart when you are really scared? It beats and thumps so hard in your chest that it feels as if it is in your throat and is going to pop out of your mouth any second.



## Heart is in the right place

### Meaning

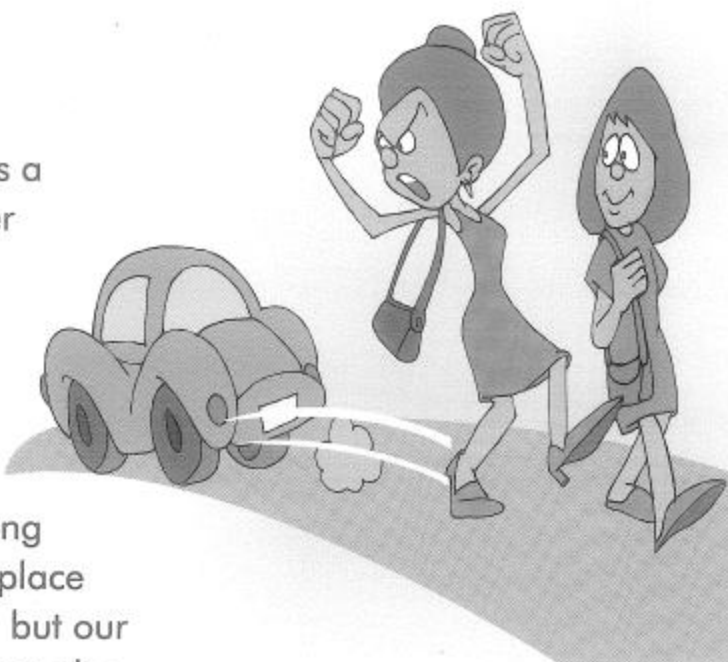
To have good intentions.

### Usage

Though many think that Aunt Frieda is a rude person, her friends know that her heart is in the right place.

### Origin

Many people think that the heart is in the left part of the chest. It is actually more towards the middle. Sometimes we do good things but they seem wrong to everyone else. Heart is in the right place is used when our actions seem wrong but our intentions are right. Emotions come from the heart and if the heart were in the wrong place, would our thoughts and actions be good?



## Wear your heart on your sleeve

### Meaning

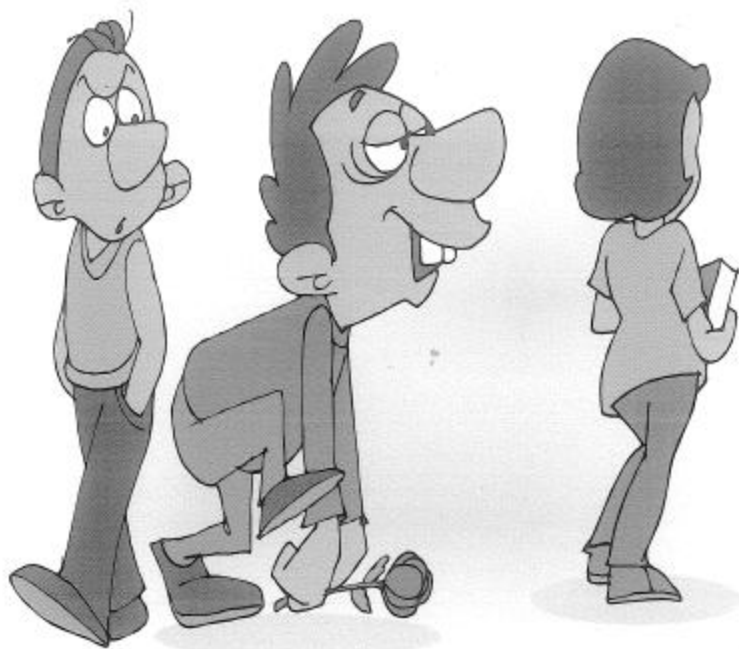
To make your feelings known.

### Usage

Everyone knows that Rick loves Joanna because Rick wears his heart on his sleeve.

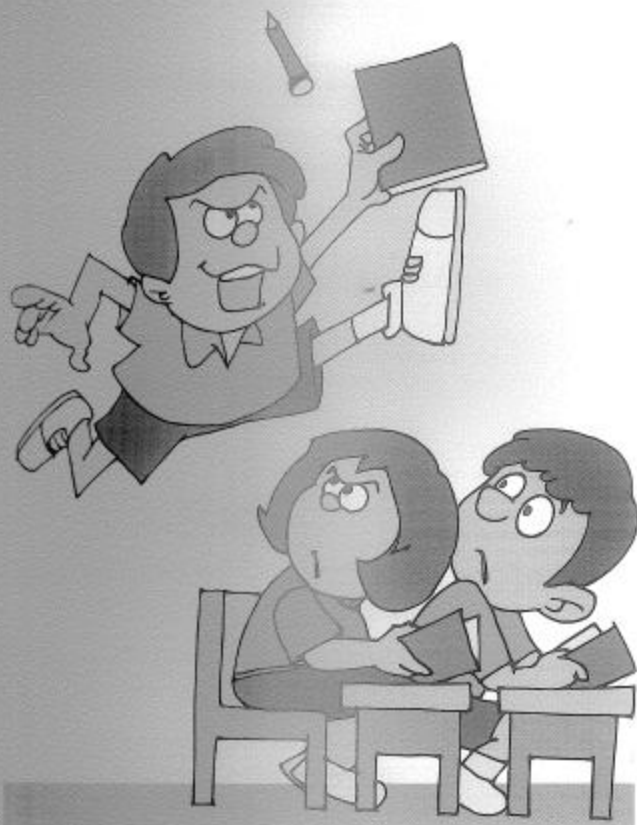
### Origin

We believe that our emotions come from the heart. In the days of William Shakespeare, when a boy and a girl were in love, the girl would tie a ribbon on the boy's arm which he would wear on his sleeve to indicate that he was taken and to make his feelings for her known to all. Ever since, the saying, wearing your heart on your sleeve has been used.



# INSECTS

Insects are the largest family of living things on Earth. Right from the coldest tundra to the hottest desert, you will find a little bug or beetle, a fly or a moth... these wonderful beings, some of them older than the dinosaurs, have crept into our lives and into our language in their own inimitable style... so here's for some creepy-crawly idioms!



## Ants in your pants

### Meaning

Jumpy, restless.

### Usage

Johnny never sits in one place but always hops about in class, like he has got ants in his pants.

### Origin

This saying probably comes from the Stone Age when man used to live in caves and all the small insects from the wild would live with him too. Ants would be everywhere, including in the pants! Imagine, if you really had ants in your pants... wouldn't you be jumping about?

## Bug someone

### Meaning

To irritate someone.

### Usage

My cousin Elena, talks non-stop while I am trying to read and this bugs me.

### Origin

When insects buzz around your face it is very irritating, isn't it? In Africa, where there are many languages and countries, the words for annoy are "baga" and "bugal". Europeans, who were exploring Africa, learnt of this and coined the saying 'to bug someone'.



## Butterflies in the stomach

### Meaning

A nervous feeling.

### Usage

Rodney sings at the top of his voice in the bathroom but on stage he gets butterflies in his stomach.

### Origin

When you are really nervous or scared, you get odd sensations in your stomach. Uneasiness, like there is something alive inside like fluttering butterflies. Similarly, when we are very hungry we say "rats are running about in my stomach". Because our stomach is a bag-like hollow, we attribute emptiness to it and equate all our sensations to animals and insects running about inside!



## Catch more flies with honey than with vinegar



### Meaning

To accomplish more by being polite.

### Usage

Edwina asked her mother for another cheese sandwich very sweetly. She knows she can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.

### Origin

Vinegar is sour like impolite people and honey is sweet like well-mannered people. Flies are attracted to sweet things like honey more than to sour things like vinegar. So, it is always beneficial to be polite.



## Fly in the ointment

### Meaning

Small annoyances that spoil the entire show.

### Usage

Everything was going well at the party until Titus arrived and started making fun of everyone. He was a real fly in the ointment.

### Origin

An ointment is a soft, smooth paste that helps to heal the skin and wounds. However, if a small thing like a fly fell into it, would you want to use it on yourself? Fly in the ointment means anyone or anything that spoils the show.



## Knee high to a grasshopper

### Meaning

Very short or very young.

### Usage

The old man told Robert that he had known his father when he was only knee high to a grasshopper.

### Origin

Grasshoppers are very small insects that have powerful legs and jump well. If you look closely, you can see their knees. And if you were only knee high to a grasshopper then you would be really young and short.



## Snug as a bug in a rug

### Meaning

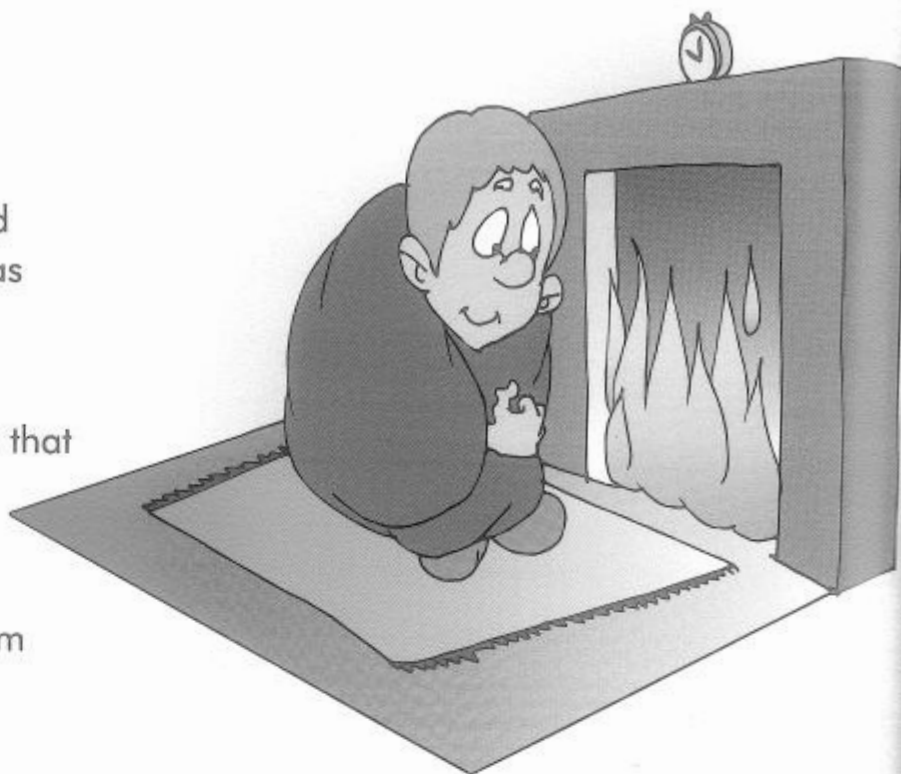
Cosy, comfortable or safe.

### Usage

After his cold and wet walk home through the storm, Robert warmed himself by the fire and soon was as snug as a bug in a rug.

### Origin

If you have ever unrolled a carpet that has been rolled up for a long time, you will notice that there are a few bugs in it sleeping cosily! Insects love to sleep in warm places. Snug means comfortable and rug is another name for a carpet.



## Stir up a hornet's nest

### Meaning

To cause trouble.

### Usage

When the entire family had gathered for Christmas, Uncle Henry came along and stirred up a hornet's nest by quarreling with Grandfather about spending so much money.

### Origin

A hornet is a kind of bee and if you went poking and prodding into its nest, it would be really mad and sting you badly. People who bring trouble to peaceful situations are said to be stirring up a hornet's nest.



# NUMBERS

As soon as a child begins to speak, he or she learns, first the alphabet and then the numbers. Numbers play a big part in our lives. We count, add, subtract, and do complex problems... all with numbers. And some numbers are more special than others... one, six, seven, ten, twelve, hundred, million... and there are a number of reasons for that. Read on... to get a count of the numbers that add to our language!



## Back to square one

### Meaning

Back to the beginning.

### Usage

We had built a lovely sand castle until Tommy fell on it and we were back to square one.

### Origin

Have you played a board game? The game usually starts on the first square and ends on the last one. In certain games, if you make a mistake in the middle of the game, you have to go back to the first square and start all over again.



## Forty winks

### Meaning

A short sleep, a nap.

### Usage

Even though Grandma is tired, she only has enough time for forty winks because she needs to finish making my sweater by Christmas.

### Origin

In the early 14th Century the word wink meant sleep. To wink forty times does not take much time at all. So, the saying forty winks just means taking a very short nap.



## On cloud nine

### Meaning

Extremely happy or joyous.

### Usage

Ever since Hilda was made leader of the group, she has been on cloud nine.

### Origin

Heaven is a very joyous place and according to the Jews, the number nine refers to the highest heaven. On cloud nine means being very happy.



## One-horse town

### Meaning

A place that is dull and with few comforts.

### Usage

Thomas wanted to leave his one-horse town and go to the city to make more money.

### Origin

In the 19th Century, people around the world travelled on horses and villages and towns were full of horses. In many towns, there were more horses than people. Imagine a town with only one horse! Would anyone like to live in a town like this with such few comforts?





## One-track mind

### Meaning

Thinking only one thing.

### Usage

Rupert has a one-track mind. He is always thinking about food.

### Origin

If you have seen a railway line, you will notice that it has two tracks so that trains can come and go in both directions. However, if it had only one track only one train could come or go. So, anyone who thinks only about one thing is said to have a one-track mind.



## One good turn deserves another

### Meaning

A good deed should always be repaid with another good deed.

### Usage

Androcles had pulled a thorn out of the lion's paw. The lion remembered and did not attack him in the arena. One good turn deserves another.

### Origin

This saying is more than five centuries old. Every time someone helps us out of a difficult situation, we want to do something in return, to show how grateful we are. The word turn in this saying refers to a good deed or action.



## Pull a fast one

### Meaning

To trick or deceive someone.

### Usage

Tony sold his bat to Harry for twice the price he had paid for it. I guess, he pulled a fast one on poor Harry.

### Origin

This saying could have originated from a magician's famous trick - where he pulls out various things from his hat. The faster he does it, the better he is able to trick and impress his audience. So tricking someone is called pulling a fast one.



## Six of one and half a dozen of another

### Meaning

One and the same.

### Usage

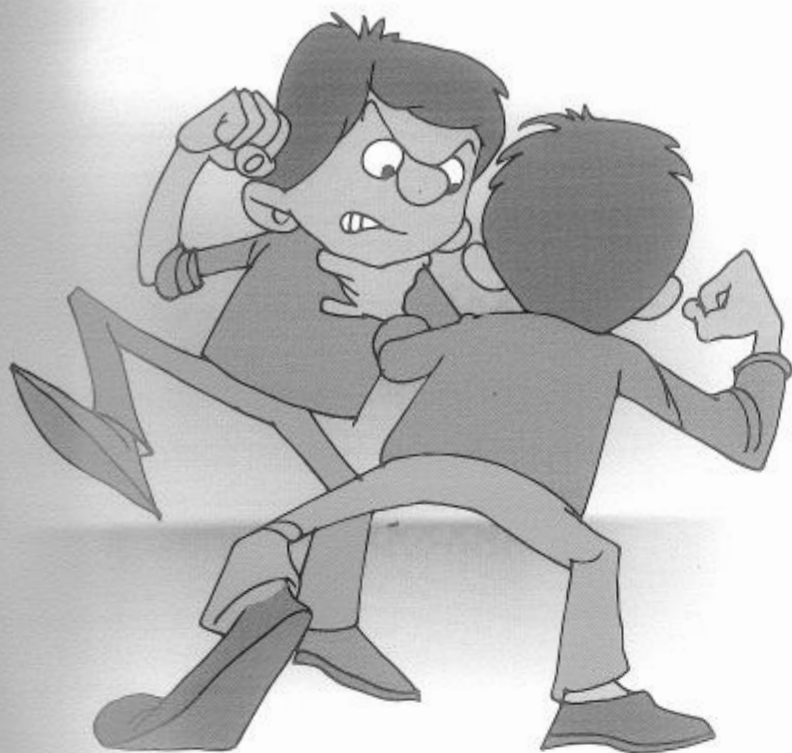
Roy doesn't mind eating vegetables or meat. To him, it's six of one and half a dozen of another.

### Origin

Isn't six equal to half a dozen? They are one and the same! Any two things that mean or add up to the same, are referred to in this way.



## Takes two to tango



### Meaning

A task that requires two people to accomplish.

### Usage

Howard wouldn't have fought with Tim, if he had not started the fight. It takes two to tango.

### Origin

South America is famous for its variety of dances and the Tango is a South American dance that requires two people. You cannot dance the tango alone. So, anything that needs two people to participate is said to take two to tango!

## Two-faced

### Meaning

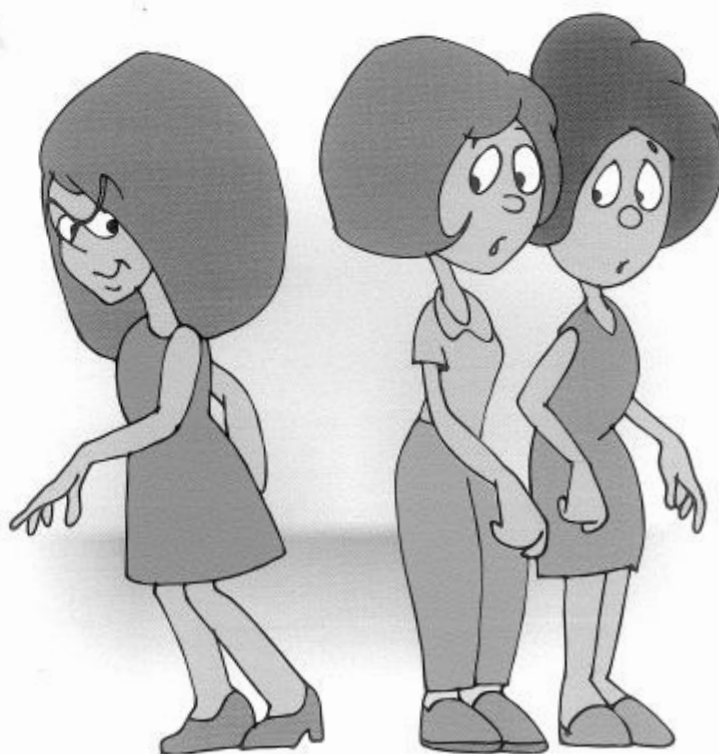
False, dishonest, deceitful.

### Usage

Nobody believes Jessica because she is so two-faced. She always says one thing and means the other.

### Origin

A person who cheats and lies will tell you one thing and tell your friend another. It's like he has two faces; he's showing you one and showing your friend the other.





# PARTS OF THE BODY

They say the body is like a temple... It is the most remarkable machine ever... move your arms, blow your nose, bat your eyelids... see how it works! The body and its working have fascinated us since the time we began our inquisitive quest on Mother Earth. We have attributed many interesting things to each part of the body and it's no wonder that these have become a part of our language, too!

## Achilles' Heel

### Meaning

Weakness, a weak spot.

### Usage

Susan is very good at Math, but History is her Achilles' heel.

### Origin

A blind poet called Homer from Greece, wrote the story of the Iliad. In this story, a mighty warrior called Achilles' only weak point was his heel. When he was born, his mother held him by a foot and dipped him into the river. Wherever the river's waters touched him, he became indestructible. However, the heel that did not touch the water, became his weak point and he was later killed by an arrow that pierced his heel. Ever since, we refer to someone's weak point as his or her Achilles' heel.



## All thumbs

### Meaning

Clumsiness.

### Usage

Though his father is a very good carpenter, Howard cannot even build a stool. He's all thumbs.

### Origin

As we all know, the thumb is the most important part of the hand. It helps us to grip or catch things. Yet, if you had only thumbs on your hands, you wouldn't be able to do much of anything. You would be dropping and breaking everything. Therefore, anyone who is clumsy, is compared to a person having only thumbs on his hands.





## Bite your tongue



### Meaning

To take back something bad that you have said.

### Usage

The Prince told his father the King, that he was too old and stupid to rule the kingdom. The King got furious and told the Prince to bite his tongue.

### Origin

You cannot speak when you are biting your tongue! So, if somebody does say this to you, it would mean that you have said something horrible and should take it back and not say it thereafter.

## Born with a silver spoon in your mouth

### Meaning

To be born into a very wealthy family.

### Usage

Cynthia has more than 60 dresses in her wardrobe. It seems that she was born with a silver spoon in her mouth!

### Origin

A silver spoon is a very expensive and beautiful object. In the olden days, people would gift newborn babies with spoons. Anyone who was rich, would gift a silver spoon. So, that's how the saying of being born with a silver spoon in your mouth came about.



## Break a leg

### Meaning

To wish good luck.

### Usage

Just as Sydney was about to go on stage, his teacher told him to break a leg.

### Origin

This saying might have two origins. It maybe from a German saying, "break your neck and leg," or it might have simply come from America. Sometimes, when you wish someone good luck it turns out to be bad. So, we deliberately wish them bad luck like breaking a leg as it is believed that the opposite will happen and good luck will shine on the person.



## Chip on your shoulder

### Meaning

To be proud and consider ones self superior to others. To have an attitude.

### Usage

Nobody wanted to be friends with Warren as he walked around the school with a chip on his shoulder.

### Origin

Long ago, young boys would play a game, where one boy would place a wooden chip on his shoulder and dare any other to knock it off. If someone did knock it off, then they would fight each other to see who was stronger. Therefore the one who had a chip on his shoulder till the end of the fight was proven the strongest.





## Cold feet

### Meaning

Fear of doing something.

### Usage

William climbed up the tree very fast but refused to come down as he got cold feet.

### Origin

We usually tend to associate hot blood with rough, angry and rude people, while on the other hand, cold bloodedness is associated with fear. So, for centuries we have used this saying to describe anyone who is scared or afraid.

## Cool your heels

### Meaning

To be kept waiting for a long time.

### Usage

There's Simon. He is cooling his heels in this long queue to buy milk.

### Origin

When you run, your feet and heels become hot. However, when you are just sitting around your heels are cool. So, if you are kept waiting for a long time, it's like you are cooling your heels.



## Fight tooth and nail

### Meaning

To fight fiercely.

### Usage

An argument broke out between Harry and Larry about who would play first and soon they were fighting tooth and nail.

### Origin

When animals fight, they use their claws and teeth. When a very bad fight breaks out between two people, it almost looks like two animals fighting using their teeth and nails.



## Get something off your chest

### Meaning

To talk about something that is bothering or worrying you.

### Usage

Sandra always goes to her favourite Aunt Martha, when she wants to get something off her chest.

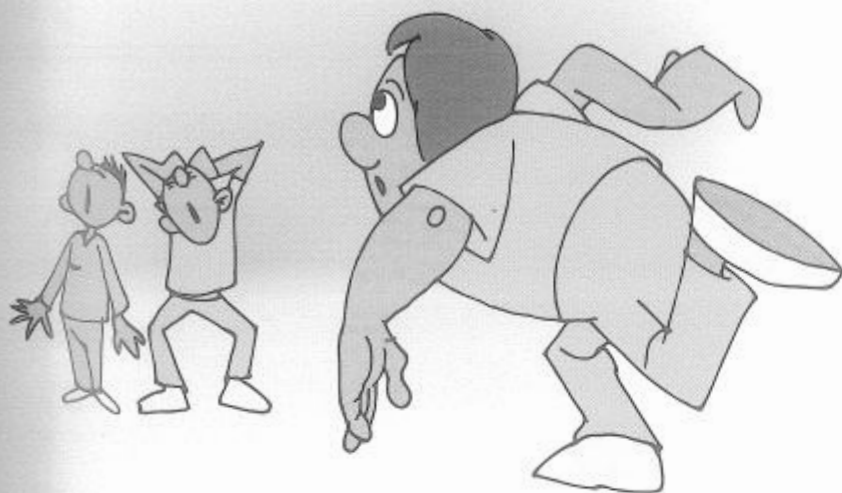
### Origin

If you have done something wrong, you feel guilt in your heart. It's like a weight on your chest, since the chest is the place where the heart is located. By talking about it, you feel better, as though a weight has been taken off your chest.





## Head and shoulders above someone



### Meaning

To be much better at something than others.

### Usage

When it comes to throwing the ball, Lawrence is head and shoulders above everyone.

### Origin

In olden times, it was thought that tall people were better at all things and short people couldn't compete with them. Being head and shoulders above someone, means being taller and better and we still use it, even though we now know that size does not matter.

## Keep a stiff upper lip

### Meaning

To be brave in times of trouble.

### Usage

Though the Rhino came charging out of the trees, the Warden kept a stiff upper lip and stood still.

### Origin

You must have noticed, that when you are scared, your lips shake and quiver, especially the upper one! If you were to stiffen your upper lip, you appear to be brave. Remaining cool in a difficult and scary situation, is what we mean by keeping a stiff upper lip!



## Out on a limb

### Meaning

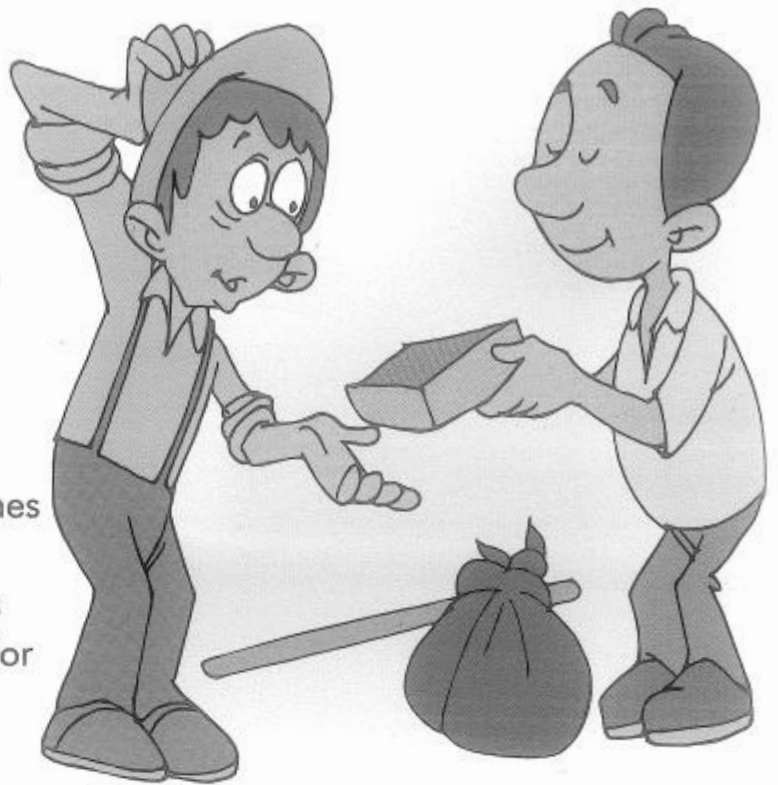
Taking a chance, or a daring step.

### Usage

Jeremy went out on a limb, when he decided to give the stranger who had been robbed, a place to rest in his home and all the money he had saved.

### Origin

In the olden days when hunting was a popular sport, an animal would sometimes climb a tree to avoid being hunted and get stranded on the limb of the tree. This was a very bad position for the animal, for it could be shot very easily up there. So, when we put ourselves in a situation, where some harm may come to us, it is similar to the animal going out on a limb.



## Pull your leg

### Meaning

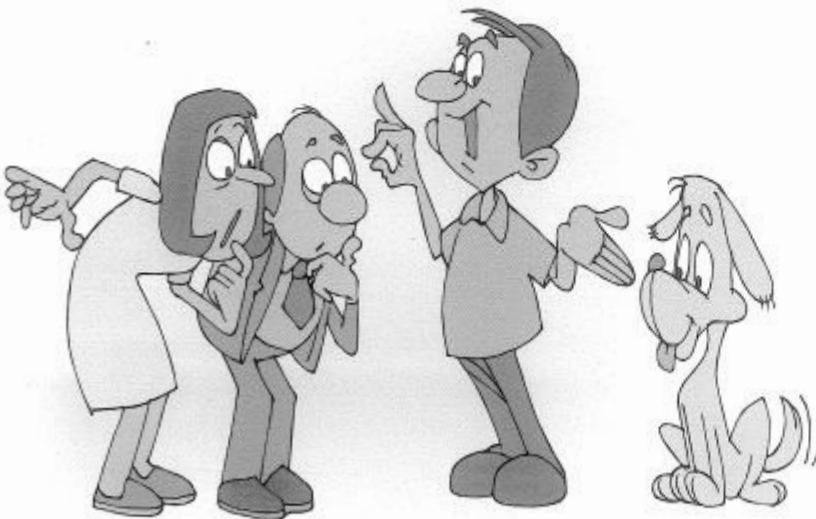
To tease someone.

### Usage

Ivan was pulling everyone's leg by telling them that his dog could play the drums.

### Origin

In the 18th Century, a popular practical joke was to trip a person. A person would wait outside a door and as soon as someone came out, they would pull their leg or trip them on a cane. That is why if you tease someone, it is called pulling his leg!



## Put your finger on something



### Meaning

To get the right answer.

### Usage

No quiz question is too tough for little Jimmy. He might think for a few seconds, but sooner or later, he puts his finger on it.

### Origin

Imagine, if you were led into a dark room and then asked to find out what was on a table. What would you do? You would feel around with your fingers and as soon as you touched something, you would know what it is. So, putting your finger on something is equal to knowing it.

## Put your shoulder to the wheel

### Meaning

To make a big effort, to work very hard.

### Usage

These men put their shoulders to the wheel and saved a cow from a pit.

### Origin

Long ago, when man travelled on horse-carts, many a time it would get stuck in the mud. The only way to get it out was to get down, put your shoulder to the wheel and push. It was very hard work but had to be done, or you would get stuck on your journey.



## Shake a leg

### Meaning

Hurry up, get going.

### Usage

Uncle Woody told us to shake a leg or we would miss the train.

### Origin

This American saying is being used ever since the 19th Century. When you are not moving, your legs are motionless. So, saying shake a leg is like saying, start moving.



## Sweep you off your feet

### Meaning

To make a good impression.

### Usage

The young scientist swept us all off our feet, by showing us his latest project on space.

### Origin

In the 19th Century, people believed that a strong emotion could make you weak enough to want to sit down. So, they made up many sayings like 'bowl you over', 'she's a knockout' and 'sweep you off your feet'.





## Tickle your funny bone

### Meaning

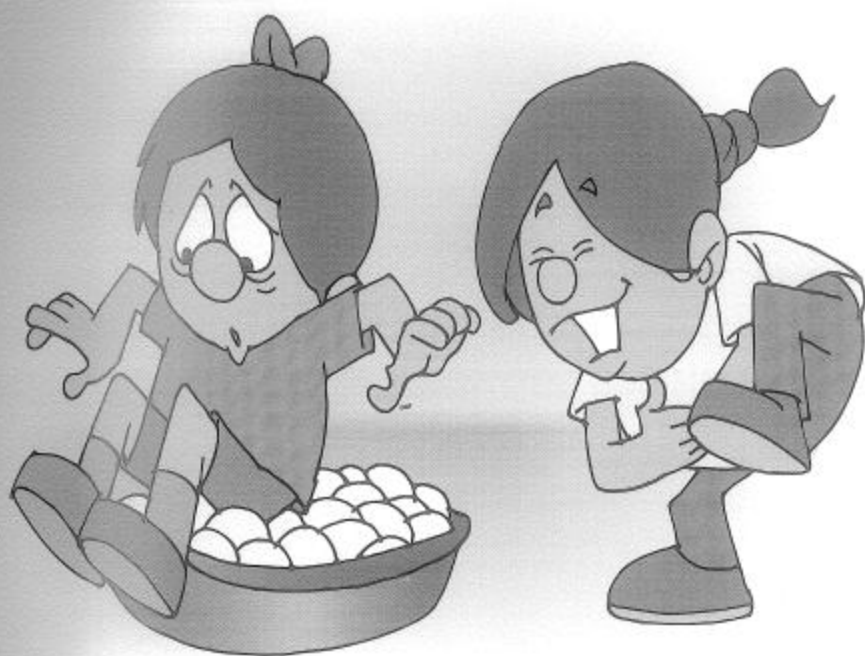
To make you laugh.

### Usage

The sight of Henry falling on a basket of eggs, really tickled my funny bone.

### Origin

The bone at the back of your elbow is called the "Humerus". Sounds a little like humour, doesn't it? Well, that's exactly how it must have sounded to whoever made a connection between these two words and invented this saying.



## Zipper your mouth

### Meaning

Stop talking, close your mouth.

### Usage

Everyone tells little Lucy to zipper her mouth, because she talks too much.

### Origin

As we all know, the zipper is a device used in baggage and clothing to close or seal. This is a fairly modern saying to tell someone to keep quiet.





# PARTS OF THE FACE

The face is the index of the mind! And of the five sense-organs, four are on the face... we pay a lot of attention to our faces and to each other's, looking for clues as to what's going on in everybody's minds. It's not surprising then, that we have coined interesting phrases with parts of the face... so here are some that increase our language's face value!

## All ears

### Meaning

Eager to listen.

### Usage

Every time someone talks about computers, Andy's favourite subject, he is all ears.

### Origin

If you were made up of only ears, then the thing you would do best is to listen. All ears means an eagerness to listen. This saying is more than three centuries old.



## Beauty is in the eye of the beholder

### Meaning

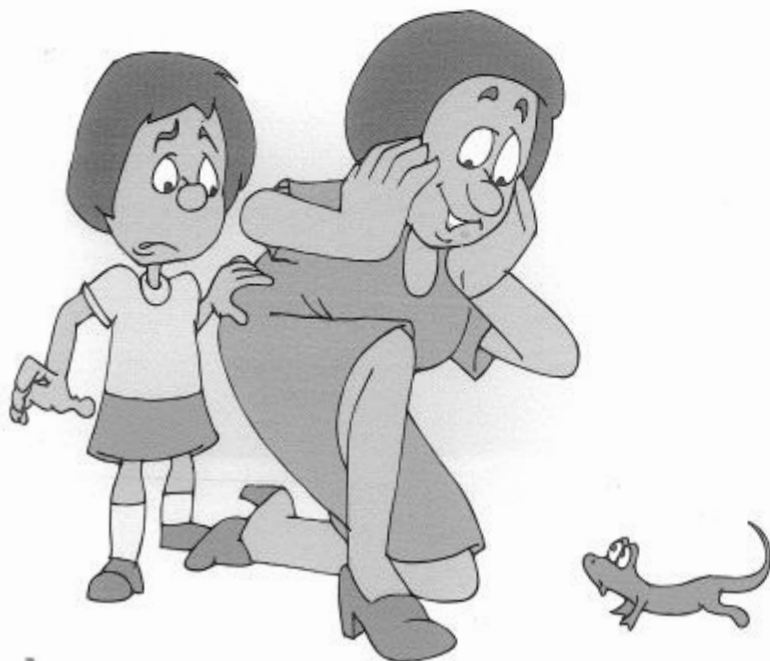
Different people have different opinions.

### Usage

Aunt Bella thinks that lizards are beautiful and magnificent creatures. I guess, beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

### Origin

It is known to all, that people judge beauty in different ways and what one considers beautiful, another may find downright ugly. We usually judge by what we see and what we know to be beautiful, so we say, beauty is in the eye of the beholder.



## Button your lip

### Meaning

Stop talking.

### Usage

When Gwen started to sing in the bus, everyone told her to button her lip.

### Origin

Many times, when someone irritates us with their talk we think about how nice it would be, if there was some quick way of making them keep quiet. Buttons on their lips would be very useful, wouldn't they? Just like "zippering your mouth"!



## Cheek by jowl

### Meaning

Very close, side by side.

### Usage

Jack and John are very close friends. Even if they fight in the morning, they are cheek by jowl by the evening.

### Origin

Jowl is just a medieval name for the jaw. Since the cheek and the jaw are so close in reality, being cheek by jowl means being very close friends or best friends.



## Cut off your nose to spite your face

### Meaning

To hurt yourself out of anger on another.

### Usage

Janet had a small fight with her best friend and has stopped talking to her. Why cut off your nose to spite your face?

### Origin

This phrase was used way back in the 13th Century. If you don't like your face would you cut off your nose? Ouch! Now, that would hurt, wouldn't it? Here face refers to other people and nose refers to you. So, in our anger with other people we sometimes try to hurt ourselves and this saying shows us, how wrong it is to do so.



## Egg on your face

### Meaning

To be embarrassed or humbled.

### Usage

Robert was showing off on his new bicycle, when he fell off it. Now, that's egg on his face!

### Origin

Do you know what people did for entertainment in the olden days? Well, they would watch plays acted out on the stage! And if they did not like the performance, they would throw rotten eggs and tomatoes on the performers. The worst insult that a performer could get, was to have egg on his face and ever since "egg on your face" means embarrassment.





## Eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth

### Meaning

To take revenge on someone in the same way as it was done to you.

### Usage

Lillian pushed Bernard into the water, so Bernard stole Lillian's clothes. That's what I call an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

### Origin

This saying first appeared in the Bible. In the early days a strict code had been laid down for punishment. Simply put, it said, that whatever evil a person committed he would be punished in equal measure. Like if you blinded a person in one eye, he could take your eye out or if you broke a man's tooth one of yours would be broken, too.



## Eyes in the back of your head

### Meaning

The ability to know what's going on even when you are not present.

### Usage

My grandfather has eyes in the back of his head. He always seems to know what mischief we're planning.

### Origin

Just imagine, if you had eyes in the back of your head! You would be able to see what goes on behind you and no one would be able to surprise you. Sometimes when people seem to know what is going on even when they are not present, we think that they have eyes in the back of their heads.



## Keep your ear to the ground

### Meaning

To be well informed.

### Usage

Ten years back Redford kept his ear to the ground and bought a small statue at a very low price. Today, it is a priceless masterpiece.

### Origin

In the 19th Century, the Americans were fighting Red Indians, to take over the land. Since people rode on horses, as automobiles had not been invented, the Indians and the soldiers would find out, if someone was approaching them, by putting their ears to the ground and listening for the sound of hooves. This practice has today become a saying, that means being well informed.



## Keep your nose to the grindstone

### Meaning

To work hard in order to succeed.

### Usage

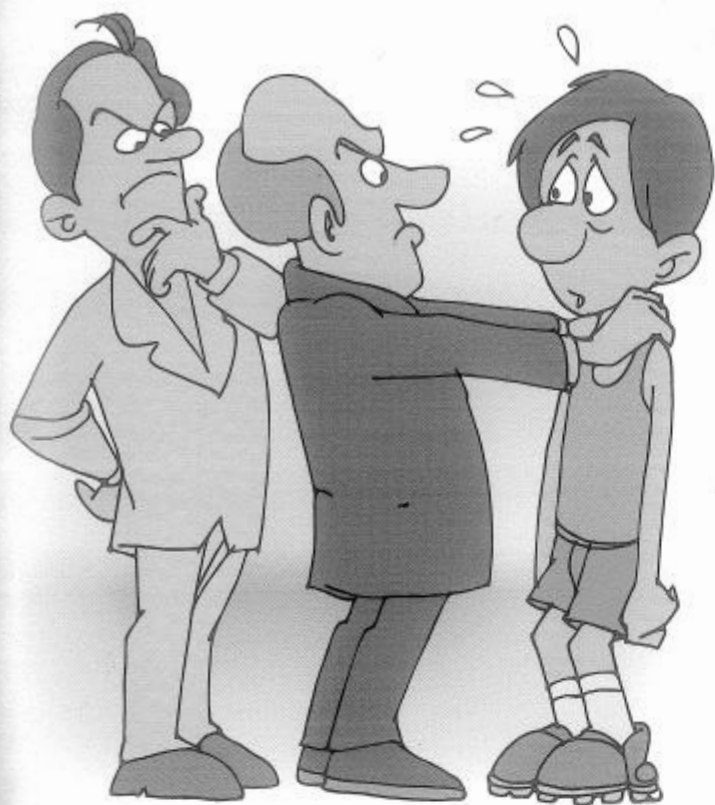
Horace made this beautiful painting by putting his nose to the grindstone for over a year.

### Origin

Grinding anything on a grindstone is one tricky job. You have to closely watch what you are doing and the only way you can do that, is by bringing your face close to it. Now, the nose is the part of the face that sticks out. So, putting your nose to the grindstone is being very attentive to the work you are doing.



## Laugh out of the other side of your mouth



### Meaning

To be made to feel sorry.

### Usage

When everyone becomes aware that George cheated in the race and won, he'll be laughing out of the other side of his mouth.

### Origin

We all know that the other side of happiness is sorrow. When we laugh, it indicates happiness. So, laughing out of the other side of the mouth, means being regretful or sad about something wrong that you have done.

## Lend an ear

### Meaning

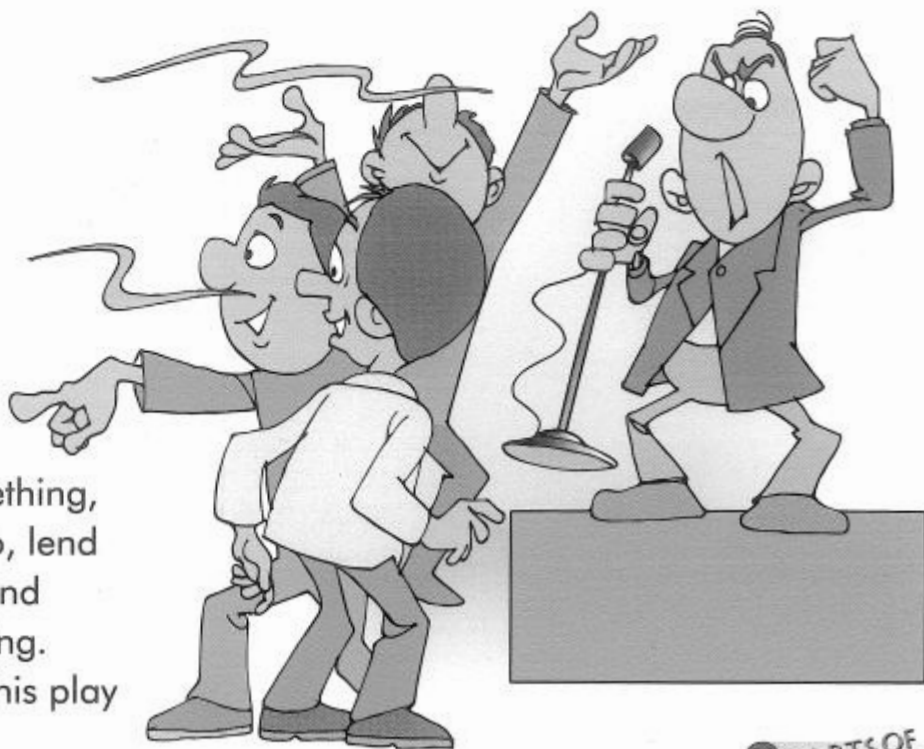
To listen to.

### Usage

The smell of the food was distracting the crowd but the leader asked them to lend an ear and brought their attention back to his speech.

### Origin

When you want to listen to something, you point your ear towards it. So, lend an ear means to pay attention and listen or concentrate on something. Shakespeare used this idiom in his play "Julius Caesar".



## Little pitchers have big ears

### Meaning

Children sometimes understand the things that adults say.

### Usage

Luke's mom and dad were talking secretly about his birthday gift but they forgot that little pitchers have big ears.

### Origin

A pitcher has handles on both sides that almost look like ears. In this saying, the little pitchers refer to children and it means that children may not be as innocent as they look and can sometimes understand what the adults are talking about.



## More than meets the eye

### Meaning

Hidden things that cannot be seen or found at first glance.

### Usage

In the beginning, I thought that swimming was very easy but I soon found out that there was more to it than meets the eye.

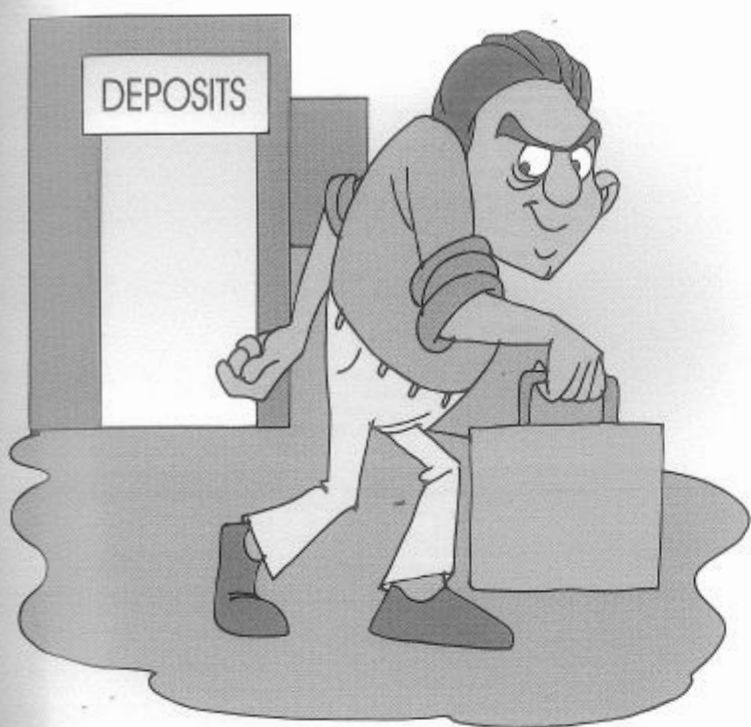
### Origin

Many times, we see something for the first time and tend to make an impression about it. However, the more we look, the more is revealed. So, it is better not to judge anything at first glance. A pond may well be deeper than it looks and a mysterious fruit could well be poisonous.





## No skin off your nose



### Meaning

Something that doesn't matter to you.

### Usage

The thief did not care about running away with other people's hard earned money. It was no skin off his nose.

### Origin

If you hurt your own nose you would certainly be bothered about it and do all you can to make it better. However, if it were someone else's nose, you wouldn't be bothered, would you? After all, it's no skin off your nose, is it?

## Van Gogh's ear for music

### Meaning

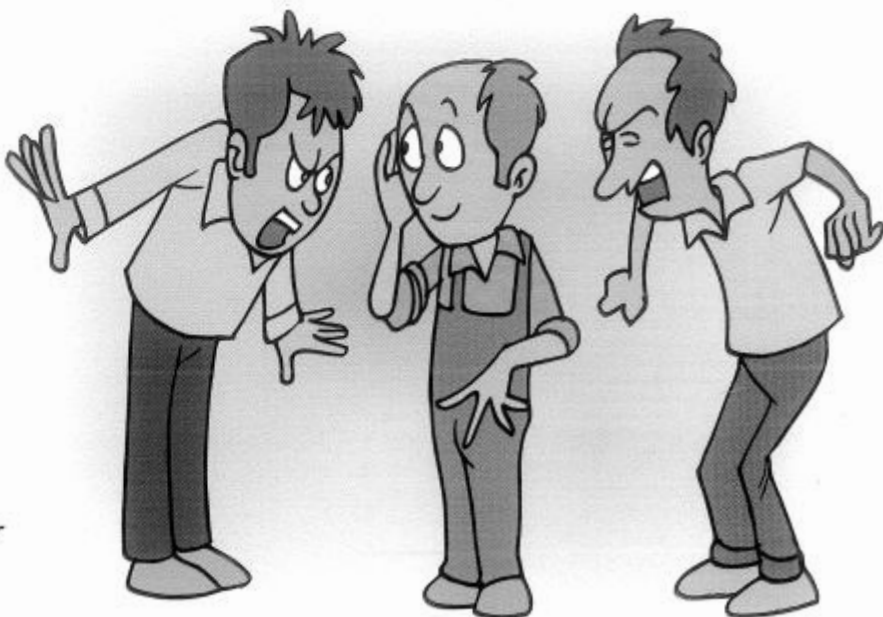
To be deaf.

### Usage

My Uncle Ben has Van Gogh's ear for music, everyone has to talk loudly around him all the time.

### Origin

Now, everyone has heard of the great artist Vincent Van Gogh. It is known that the famous artist had an ear that had been cut off. This saying has been used ever since, to describe deaf people.



## Pull the wool over your eyes

### Meaning

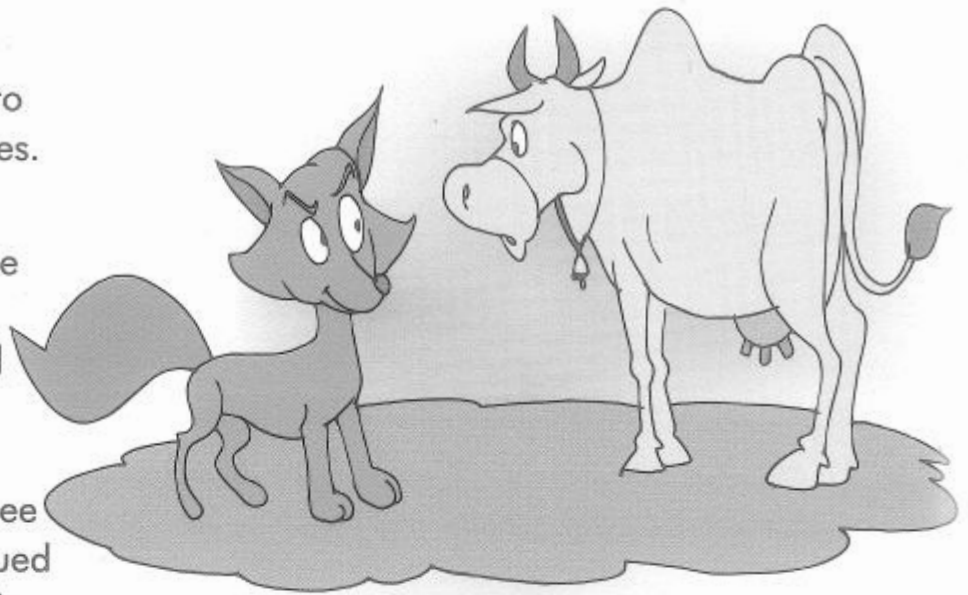
To fool someone.

### Usage

The fox coloured himself blue to pull the wool over the cow's eyes.

### Origin

In the late 18th Century, people wore woollen wigs which till today are worn by lawyers and judges in certain countries. If the wig were pulled over your eyes, you wouldn't be able to see a thing. Suppose a lawyer argued cleverly and fooled the judge, it was like he had pulled the wool over the judge's eyes.



## Put your money where your mouth is

### Meaning

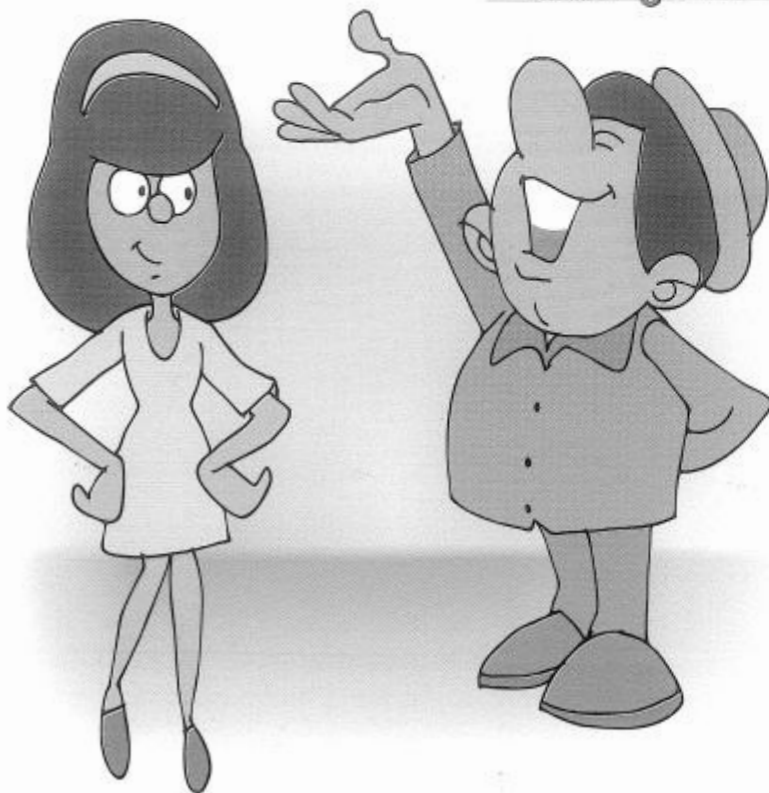
To prove your words with your actions.

### Usage

Ned never puts his money where his mouth is. He always talks about doing big things but never does anything.

### Origin

In other words, it just means practice what you preach. Here, mouth refers to our talk and money means our actions. Always put your money where your mouth is, means always put into action what you say you will do!



## Raise an eyebrow

### Meaning

To be surprised with someone's actions or words.

### Usage

Five year old Lydia always acts so grown up that wherever she goes, she raises quite a few eyebrows.

### Origin

When we hear or see something that surprises or confuses us, we tend to frown or raise an eyebrow. And when we see people doing things that are unusual or that they are not supposed to be doing, we raise our eyebrows at them to express surprise or even disapproval!



## See eye to eye

### Meaning

To agree with each other.

### Usage

Neil and Simon never see eye to eye about anything and are always fighting

### Origin

This saying actually comes from the Bible. Imagine, that you are standing at the side of someone and both of your heads were turned the same way, so you would be seeing the same thing. In ancient times, people thought that if two people saw the same thing, it would mean that their point of view was the same and they agreed with each other.



## Sight for sore eyes

### Meaning

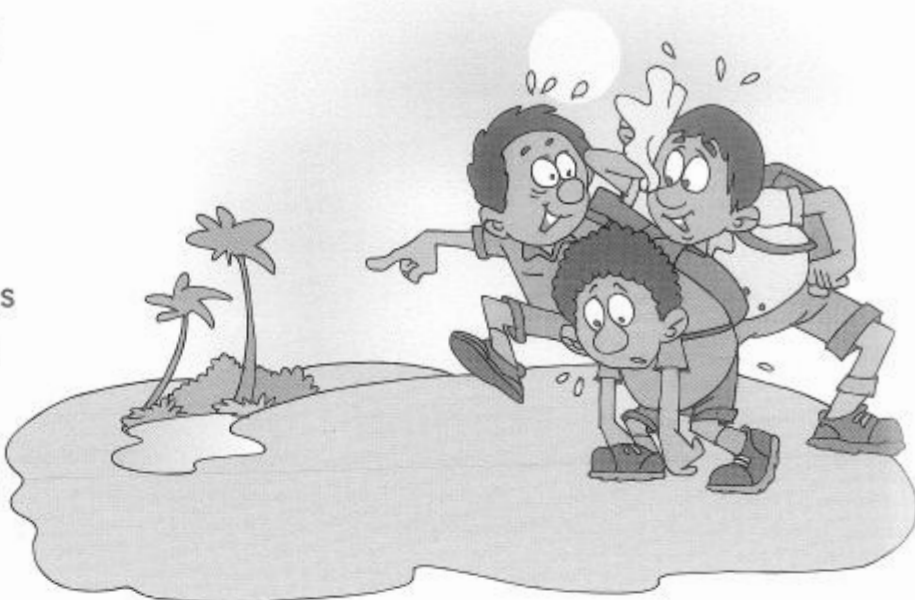
A pleasant surprise.

### Usage

Seeing the oasis after wandering for days in the desert, was a sight for our sore eyes.

### Origin

Worrying too much makes you frown and stare and dark patches form under your eyes. When you find a solution to your problem, your sore and dark eyes brighten up with joy. So anything that's a welcome change, is a sight for sore eyes!



## Tongue in cheek

### Meaning

Not serious, a joke.

### Usage

Nobody takes offence at Uncle Sam poking fun at them. They know, it's just tongue in cheek.

### Origin

Sometimes when we say or do things that we intend as a joke, we wink after saying them, or make funny faces or put our tongue in our cheek. So, tongue in cheek is anything that is meant to be a joke.





## Turn up your nose at someone

### Meaning

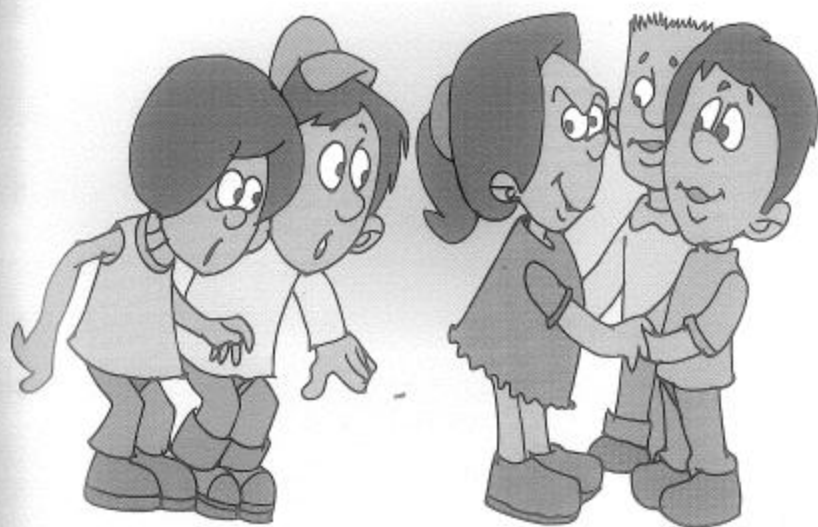
To show that someone or something is not good enough for you.

### Usage

As soon as Sally found new friends she turned up her nose at her old friends.

### Origin

In the olden days, kings and queens were considered to be superior to the common people. Royalty would always walk around with their face held high and their noses turned up, to indicate that they were superior.



## Turn the other cheek

### Meaning

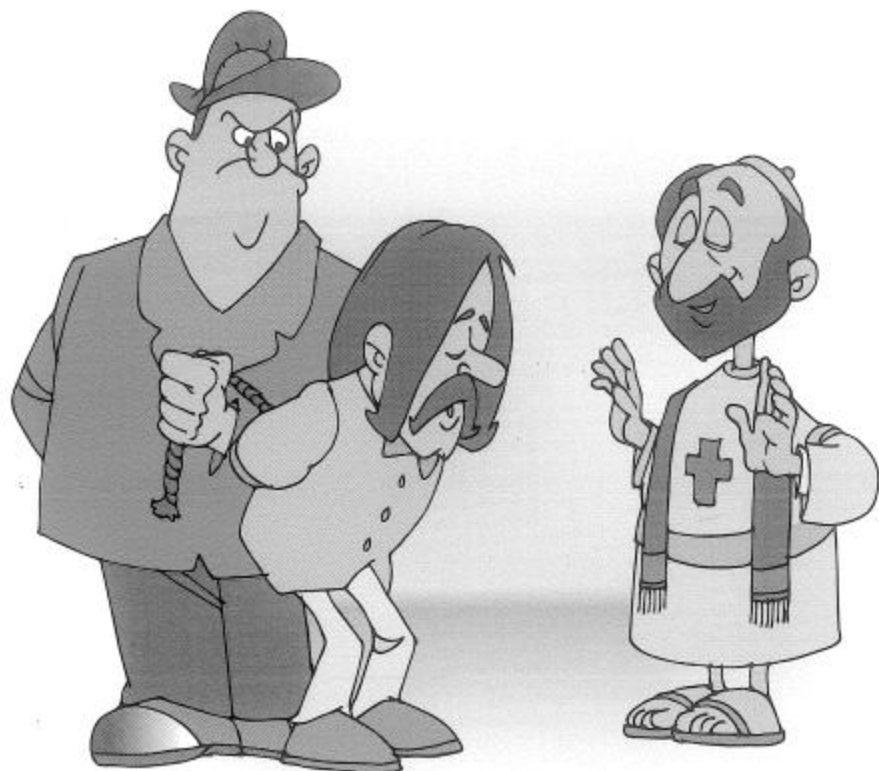
To forgive someone.

### Usage

When the thief came to Myriel to beg for forgiveness, Myriel could see that he was really sorry, and turned the other cheek and forgave him, instead of punishing him.

### Origin

In the Bible, Jesus advised his followers that if someone slapped them on one cheek they should not be angry, but turn and show him the other cheek, as a sign of forgiveness for their wrongdoing. This was a definite improvement on the earlier code of an "eye for an eye" and a tooth for a tooth!



## Wet behind the ears

### Meaning

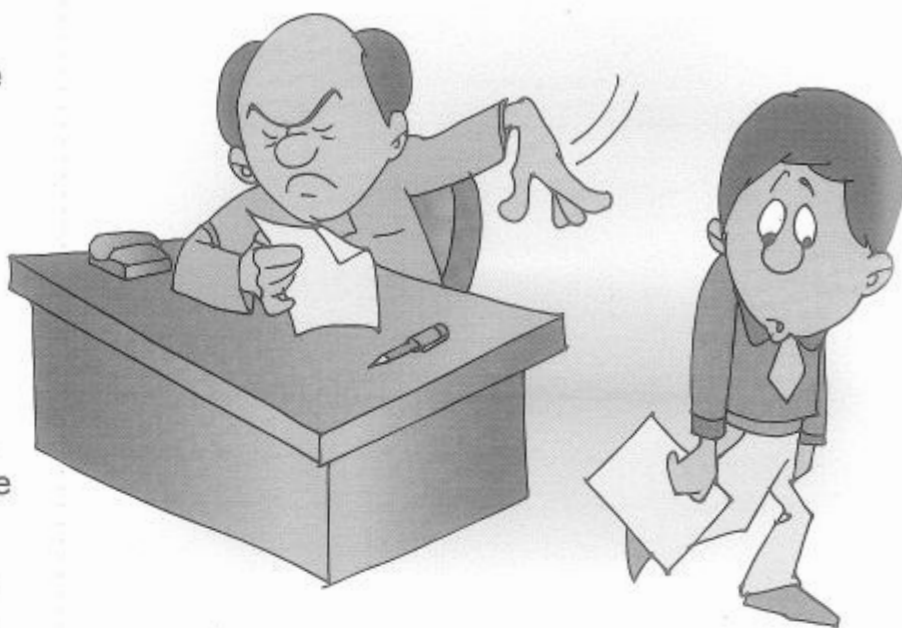
Young and inexperienced.

### Usage

No one would give young George a job because he was wet behind the ears.

### Origin

We all know that babies are young and inexperienced. A new born colt or calf is all sticky and wet, covered in its birth fluid. Though it dries off very quickly, the skin behind its ears takes a very long time to dry. In the early 20th Century, armed forces in America started using this expression to describe newly recruited soldiers.



## Without batting an eyelid

### Meaning

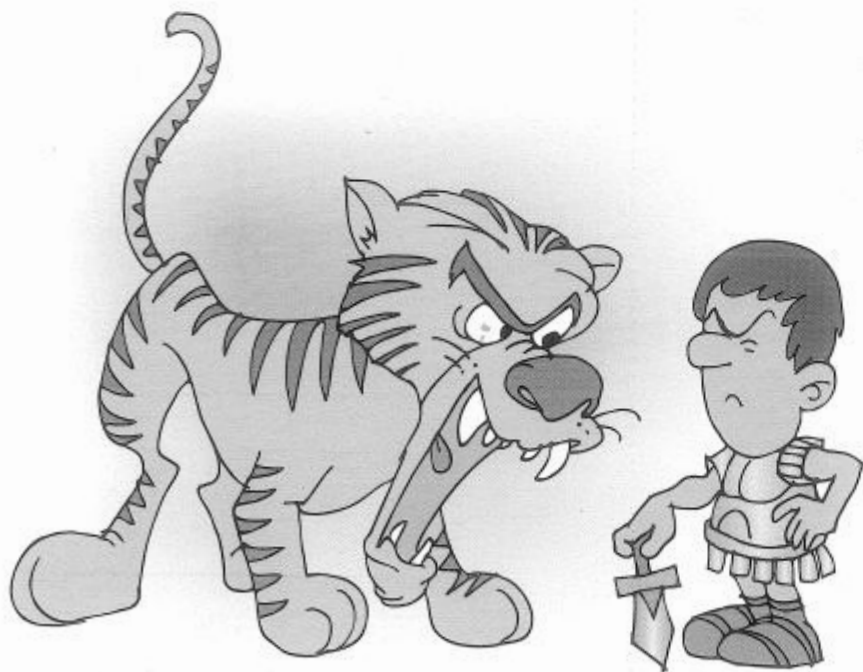
Without showing any emotion.

### Usage

The tiger that faced Julius was terrifying but he stood still and faced it bravely, without batting an eyelid.

### Origin

In olden days, the word for blinking was batting. When we feel scared or something startles us, we tend to blink or express our emotions in some way. Without batting an eyelid means, not expressing your fear or surprise.



# PLANTS & FLOWERS

We coexist happily with all the flora on the Earth. Beautiful plants and flowers excite us and soothe our feelings, we gift them to show our love and appreciation, we grow them, we eat them, we use them as medicine... and now we have them striking root in our language and growing beautifully, as we use them everyday...



## Bark up the wrong tree

### Meaning

To have the wrong idea.

### Usage

My aunt wants me to become a great musician. However, she's barking up the wrong tree, because it's my sister who loves music.

### Origin

Dogs would be first sent out to spot prey for hunting. So, if they found some animal scent leading up to a tree, the dog would stand under that tree and bark, not really knowing whether the animal is still up in the tree or not.



## Beat around the bush

### Meaning

To avoid doing a thing or answering a question.

### Usage

It was clear that he was beating around the bush when the guide lost his way and started giving vague answers to all our questions.

### Origin

During a hunting expedition, the drummers go first, beating their drums in order to drive out the animals hiding in the bushes. However, if they beat too hard, the animals escape and they end up beating around the bush for a while, in vain. So, not answering a question directly is called beating around the bush.



## Bed of roses

### Meaning

A wonderful and pleasant thing.

### Usage

Father says after the invention of the computer, his job as an accountant is a bed of roses

### Origin

This saying was invented by the English poets, who frequently used it in their poetry. Roses are beautiful, sweet smelling and pleasant. Therefore, a bed of roses is the softest, nicest and most comfortable thing on earth. No wonder then, that people caught on to this saying.



## Can't see the forest for the trees

### Meaning

To overlook a big thing because of paying too much attention to small things.

### Usage

By throwing the banana skin on the road, the old lady kept her bag clean but did not see the forest from the trees, and the poor cyclist slipped and broke his bones.

### Origin

A forest is green and dense and you can easily get lost. However, if you were to start concentrating on each tree, you would be focused on its leaves and branches and would miss the rest of the forest. In a similar way the mind can sometimes become so focused upon insignificant things, that it fails to see the bigger picture.





## Come up smelling like a rose

### Meaning

To get out of an embarrassing situation, without damaging your reputation.

### Usage

The soldier forgot to polish his boots but he came up smelling like a rose by spitting on them and wiping them.

### Origin

Whoever wrote this, was definitely thinking of someone falling into a pile of garbage, but still coming out of it smelling like a rose. It means to get out of some trouble without damaging your name or reputation.



## Gild the lily

### Meaning

To spoil something that is already good.

### Usage

Florence has too much makeup on her face and now it looks really bad. Why did she have to gild the lily?

### Origin

Do you know what gilding means? It means to cover anything with a thin layer of gold. If you covered a lily with a thin layer of gold, it would mar the beauty and scent of the beautiful flower and make it look artificial and ugly.



## Go climb a tree

### Meaning

Go away, stop bothering me.

### Usage

Kyle had already had three glasses of juice so when he asked for one more, his mother told him to go climb a tree.

### Origin

If someone was annoying you and you wanted him or her to leave you alone, what would you do? You would tell him or her to go do something else and stop bothering you. Maybe you would tell them to go fly a kite or climb a tree.



## Sow your wild oats

### Meaning

To behave foolishly.

### Usage

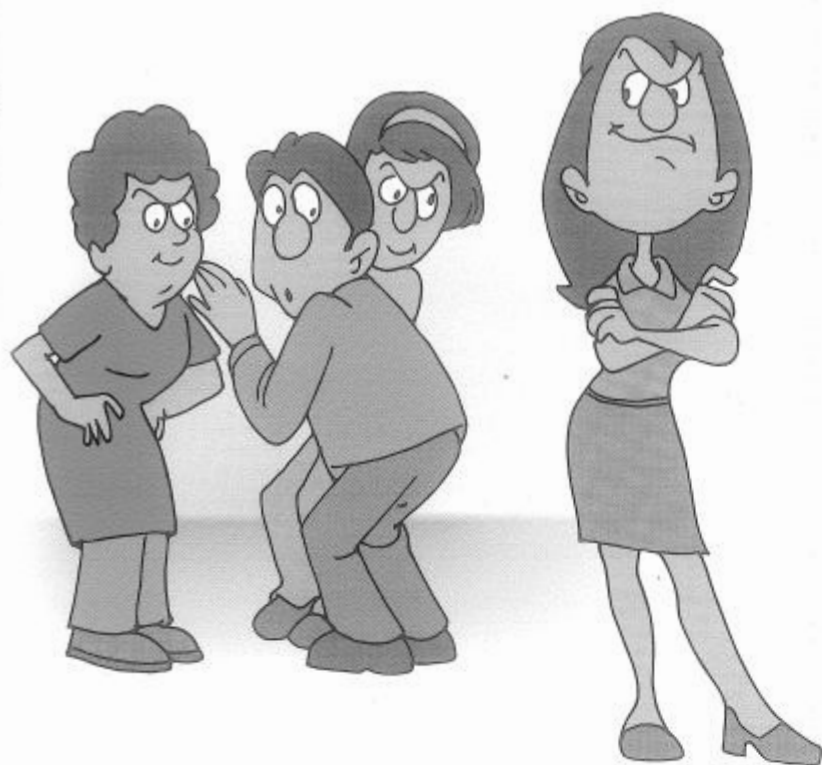
Though Mr. Dean looks calm and sensible, Aunt Hilda said he used to sow his wild oats, when he was in college.

### Origin

The wild oat is a weed. So, if you were sowing weeds, you must be really crazy because weeds are bad for normal plants. So, anybody who behaves foolishly is sowing his wild oats. This saying is mostly used to describe the foolish things we do in our youth.



## Through the grapevine



### Meaning

Gossip, rumours.

### Usage

Through the grapevine, Diana became aware that all of her friends were planning to play a big practical joke on her.

### Origin

A grapevine as the name suggests is a long creeper. In the same way that it winds along from a bunch of grapes to another, news or gossip can travel from one person to another.

## Turn over a new leaf

### Meaning

To make a new beginning and correct yourself.

### Usage

Uncle Xavier used to smoke both cigars and cigarettes but now he has given up this habit and has turned over a new leaf.

### Origin

I'm sure you know that a leaf is the small thing that grows on trees. Yes! But it also means a page of a book. When do people turn over to a new page? When they want to write or read something new! Like getting a fresh start.





# WATER

Water covers 70% of the surface of the planet we live on. It's in our ponds, rivers, seas, oceans. It rains down on us... we drink it, cook with it, wash with it, grow our food with it... imagine a world without water... and imagine if we did not use it to irrigate our language... we would end up with arid phrases and expressions!

## Blood is thicker than water

### Meaning

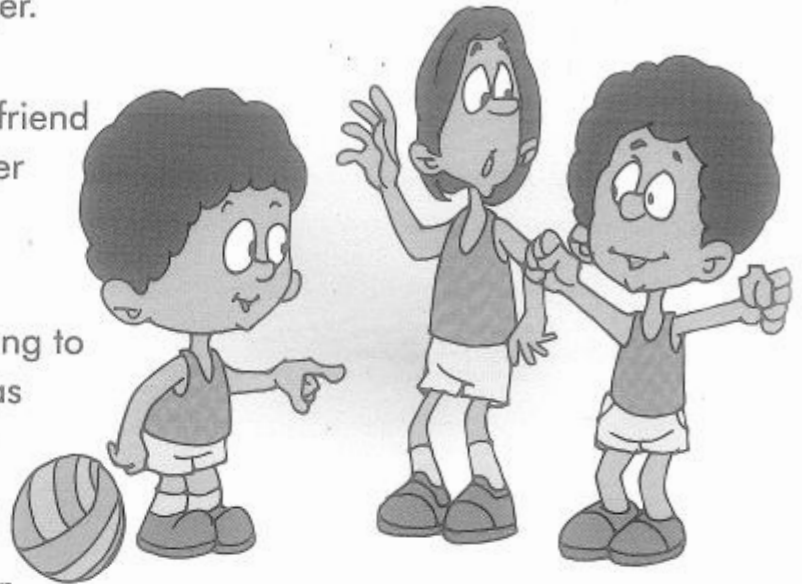
To favour a family member over a stranger.

### Usage

When Bobby had to choose between his friend and his brother, he chose his brother. After all blood is thicker than water!

### Origin

Whoever invented this saying, was referring to family members as blood and to others as water. A family member is considered to be of the same blood. Whenever one chooses a family member over anyone else, even though the other may be better qualified, it is said that blood is thicker than water.



## Fish out of water

### Meaning

A person who does not fit in, out of place.

### Usage

Charlie felt like a fish out of water when he went to the park with his father and his golf buddies. He had nothing to talk about with them as they only spoke about golf.

### Origin

A fish lives in water. Take it out and it will die for sure. A fish's place is in the water. So, anything that is out of place is referred to as a fish out of water.





## In hot water



### Meaning

In serious trouble.

### Usage

Nancy broke her mother's favourite vase. Now, she's in hot water.

### Origin

This saying has a very simple explanation. Imagine if you were in hot water being boiled. You would be in serious trouble then, wouldn't you?

## Keep your head above water

### Meaning

To make just enough money to survive, to manage.

### Usage

It hadn't rained this year and the farmers kept their heads above water, by selling off their previous year's harvest.

### Origin

Trying to keep your head above water is what you would try to do, if you were drowning and didn't know how to swim. Here drowning refers to being in a desperate situation.



## Make your mouth water

### Meaning

To crave or desire something that you love to eat, to be attracted to something edible.

### Usage

The old cook makes such delicious cakes, that just the heavenly smell of the freshly baked cake, is enough to make your mouth water.

### Origin

Just smelling or looking at something you would like to eat, makes your salivary glands secrete saliva? It makes your mouth water! Like cheese or mangoes. Yum! So anything that is attractive or desirable, would make your mouth water, too!



## Pour oil on troubled waters

### Meaning

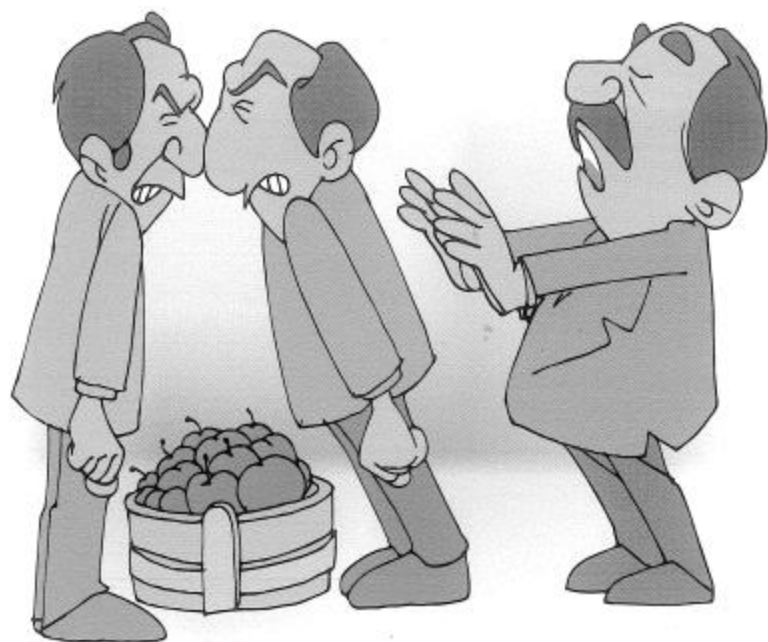
To calm a situation, to soothe someone's anger.

### Usage

Two men started fighting over the apples but the village chief poured oil on the troubled waters, by showing them how they could share the apples equally.

### Origin

In the late 18th Century, people actually believed that the best way to calm a stormy sea, was to pour oil on the water. This belief led to the origin of this saying - pouring oil on troubled waters. A fight or an argument is like the stormy sea, with the troubled waters and the actions or the words used to calm the situation, is the oil.



## Still waters run deep

### Meaning

Never judge anything by its appearance.

### Usage

The stranger looked so kind and helpful but soon everyone found out, that he was a cruel and mean man. Still waters run deep!

### Origin

It has been said in so many cultures and in so many languages that people don't drown in a fast flowing river, because they get caught in the current and are carried off to some place. However, if you happen to fall into the still waters of a lake there's a good chance that you'll drown because you can never judge exactly how deep the water is, when it is still.



## Throw cold water over something

### Meaning

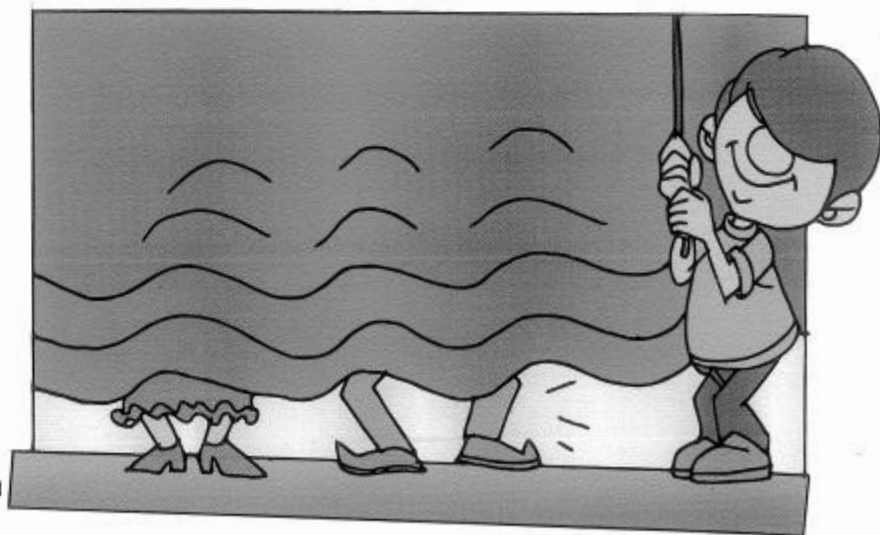
To kill someone's enthusiasm, to discourage someone.

### Usage

Francis threw cold water over the play, when he dropped the curtain before it was over.

### Origin

How do you put out a fire? Well, you throw cold water on it! Here, fire is referred to as a sign of life or enthusiasm. So, putting out the fire, is like killing someone's enthusiasm.



## Water over the dam

### Meaning

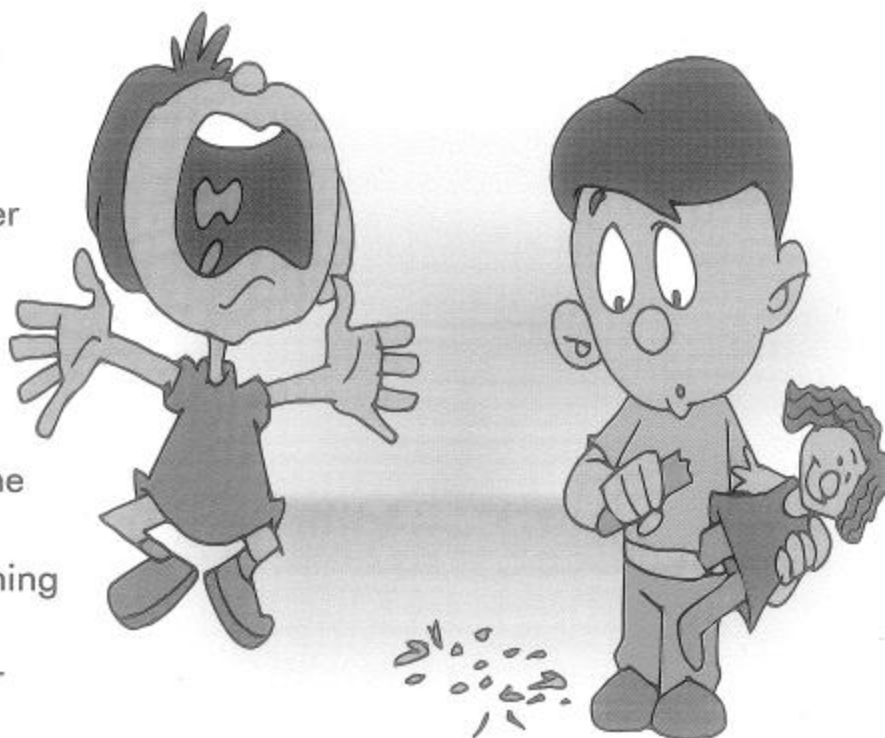
An event in the past that cannot be changed.

### Usage

Gloria is crying because her brother broke her doll, but it is no use now as it is water over the dam.

### Origin

Have you seen water flowing over the dam? Once it has gone over the dam, it is impossible to make it come back. In the same way, anything that has already taken place and cannot be changed, is called water over the dam.



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